

S E R M O N S, *

CHIEFLY UPON

RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY,

BY THE

A U T H O R

O F T H E

E S S A Y S

O N

PUBLIC WORSHIP, &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. PAYNE, at the Mews-Gate ; G. KEARSLEY,
at No. 46, Fleet-Street ; P. ELMSLEY, opposite South-
ampton-Street, Strand ; and E. and C. DILLY, in the
Poultry.



Standers

P R E F A C E.

THE following sermons would have been consigned to oblivion if they had not furnished some of my hearers with the best reasons they can produce for calling in question my fidelity and truth, as a minister of the christian religion. I am unconcerned about what the world may think of my faith; but I am not so indifferent about imputations on my honesty. The strain of charity which I have wished for among christians, * is, it seems, beyond what

* Vide Essays on public Worship.

is

is warranted in the gospel; and therefore I am not a christian. If the whole of this proposition be true, I am highly contented with the imputation. If christian charity will not suffer us to drop all controverted opinions in public worship, and to join with all honest men, *Jews*, *Turks* and *Infidels* not excepted, in adoring the Deity; it is not a principle virtuous enough for me. I apprehended it would, and I shall be extremely sorry to be convinced of my mistake; for in that moment my infidelity may be dated.

I learnt my religion as I learnt my catechism; I committed what good things I read and heard of it to memory. I believe this is the general method of acquiring principles. For
they

they are taught when the mind is incapable of comprehending them; and when it employs hardly any powers but those of sense, and what is improperly called memory. The philosophical reader therefore may consider many of the principles of the following sermons as preposessions. I know them to be so myself. I was always sincere, however, in what I thought the belief of them, and I made the best use of them I could. This is the only thing I wish to prove to the world—that sustaining the character of a christian minister, I always apprehended myself to be a true christian; and for the same reasons that almost all christians do; because they had committed to memory what they
sup-

supposed to be good christian principles. Nay for better reasons if I had committed to memory a better set of principles.

I honestly confess, that from a fair and full investigation, I do not know whether they are true or false. It is not long since I have first traced even the formation of an idea, by an actual survey of what has passed in my own mind. I may never have leisure; or I may not live long enough to pursue my enquiries in the manner I now do through all the intermediate steps which lead up to religion; if I do, and any thing arises which I think of importance to the public, I will *honestly* make it known.

In

P R E F A C E. ▼

In the mean time I wish to be considered as having acted myself on the best principles I could obtain; as having no quarrel with other people for whatever they may honestly believe, and desirous of promoting those principles and measures which may be most conducive to the virtue and happiness of the world.

I have here given all the sermons which I have ever known to offend, and to bring on me the imputation of infidelity; except the second part of the sermon on lying, and one on loving our enemies, which I preached on a fifth of November, when most people expect to hear good reasons for hating them, and would be enraged at a disappointment. They seem to apprehend

vi P R E F A C E.

prehend that they cannot secure themselves from popery, but by adopting what is most exceptionable in it, and retaliating injuries and reproaches. These are lost; they would otherwise have been inserted in this collection.

The sermons may, in some places, be more inaccurate or inelegant than they would have been, if it had been in my power to correct or to transcribe them.

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S E R-

C O N T E N T S

Of the FIRST VOLUME.

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*"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such
"a one as thyself."* Psalm l. ver. 21.

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The general Vanity of Human Pursuits.

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*"Surely every man walketh in a vain
"shew; surely they are disquieted in
"vain."* Psalm xxxix. ver. 6.

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*"Mark the perfect man, and behold the up-
"right; for the end of that man is peace."*
Psalm xxxvii. ver. 37.

VOL. I.

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C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N IV.

Charity to the Poor. Page 77.

*" When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call
" not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither
" thy kinsman, nor thy rich neighbours;
" lest they also bid thee again, and a re-
" compense be made thee: but when thou
" makest a feast, call the poor, the maim-
" ed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt
" be blessed; for they cannot recompense
" thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the
" resurrection of the dead."*

Luke xiv. ver. 12, 13, 14.

S E R M O N V.

Love of Pleasure. Page 95

" Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."
2 Tim. iii. ver. 4.

S E R M O N VI.

Piety to God. Page 115.

*" And God said, let the earth bring forth
" grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-
" tree*

C O N T E N T S.

*“ tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose
“ seed is in itself upon the earth: and it
“ was so. And the earth brought forth
“ grass, and the herb yielding seed after
“ its kind, and the tree yielding fruit,
“ whose seed was in itself, after its kind:
“ and God saw that it was good.”*

Gen. i. ver. 11, 12.

S E R M O N VII.

The nature of the Lord's Supper.

Page 137.

*“ And he took bread, and gave thanks, and
“ brake it, and gave it unto them, saying,
“ This is my body which is given for you :
“ this do in remembrance of me. Likewise,
“ also the cup, after supper, saying, This
“ cup is the new testament in my blood,
“ which is shed for you.”*

Luke xxii. ver. 19, 20.

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S E R M O N VIII.

False Apprehensions. Page 161.

*“Whoſoever ſhall eat this bread, and drink
“ this cup unworthily, ſhall be guilty of the
“ body and blood of the Lord. But let a
“ man examine himſelf, and then let him
“ him eat of tha. bred, and drink of that
“ cup: for he that eateth and drinketh
“ unworthily, eateth and drinketh damna-
“ tion to himſelf, not diſcerning the Lord’s
“ body.”* 1 Cor. xi. ver. 27, 28, 29.

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F A L S E

FALSE PIETY.



S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N I.

F A L S E P I E T Y.

*“Thou thoughtest, that I was altogether such
“a one as thyself.”* Psalm l. v. 21.

THERE are but few things more mortifying to human vanity than the truth in the text; especially, if it be considered as a general proposition, and extended not only to the vicious, ignorant and superstitious, but to the good, the wise and the learned. Human nature, in almost all cases, is the standard of the divine; and almost every man makes his God to be such as himself.

This is partly owing to the imperfection of our faculties, for which this subject is too wonderful; and partly owing to an injudicious haste in our education, when we are required to form notions of which we are not capable, and to talk of a being which it is impossible we should know any thing of. A child whose understanding is just opening and who cannot in some years be made to comprehend the growth of a flower, or the structure of a tree, is taught his catechism among his first lessons; and the incomprehensible God, whom no man can find out to perfection, and who is contemplated only with wonder and adoration by the most exalted of his creatures, is made the object of his knowledge. This is one of the most absurd and pernicious errors in the management of mankind. It is however sanctified by custom, and by such plausible reasons as deserve to be considered.

It is said, that it can never be too early to teach what is true; and that if the mind in early education be not furnished with sentiments

ments of a God, it will probably never have any, and the soul will be lost for want of knowledge. To this it may be answered; that if children have no capacities for the knowledge of God, all attempts to teach them are at least so much labour lost. It is like sowing seed in ground totally unprepared, or expecting the ripest and choicest fruits of autumn in the first opening of the spring. The knowledge of God is the last object of human attainment; to which all other branches are preparatory, and which is but imperfectly attained when we have gone through those preparatory branches, and are capable of the highest exertions of the human understanding. To attempt to teach a child therefore the knowledge of God is to attempt an impossibility: nay it is worse, as all our injudicious measures are. In pursuing them, we not only lose the end we aim at, but do mischief in a variety of ways. The child who is made to commit to memory sentiments and opinions which he does not understand, is in the situation of the child who

is furnished with edge tools of which he knows not the use. They are both in equal danger, only that those about them are not equal judges of their cases. Every parent can see when a child has cut himself, but not when his capacity is maimed, or when his mind is injured. It is therefore difficult to apply a remedy at the only season, perhaps, when remedies are thoroughly effectual, because the persons who should apply them cannot be made sensible of the danger—I shall, however, exhibit a state of the case as it affects religion, and leave every one to make what use of it he pleases.

The health and constitution of our bodies, and the temper and disposition of our minds, greatly depend on the steps which have been taken in our education. I do not mean what is commonly called so in schools, but the management and behaviour of our parents from our very cradles to the last moment of their authority. But as my business is not the general subject of education, I shall confine myself to the religious
part

part of it ; and shew the evils which arise from the present methods of conducting it— Knowledge is always pleasing to the mind ; it is necessary it should be so to serve the purposes of improvement and goodness. The reason why it is offensive to children is, that it is improperly offered ; they are not led into it by gradual steps ; and they are punished by things they cannot understand ; instead of being delighted by things suited to their capacities. The first objects of knowledge ; the first business of education ; and the first steps towards religion, are all the things around us which we should endeavour to understand ; their names, their properties, and their uses. By attentively considering their wonderful formation, their growth, their beauty, and use to us, we are led to conceive of the Being who made them, as wise, powerful and good. When we consider animals in the long gradation, from the smallest reptile up to man, our notions of a Deity are improved—They are yet more so, if we consider the heavens as

3 FALSE PIETY.

work of his hands. The sun fixed in the centre of our system, and various worlds revolving round it, and receiving light and heat from its influence are astonishing objects of knowledge. The stars fixed as the sun is, and every one of them of the same use, give an idea of God which we can only adore in all humility, as incomprehensible and ineffable. This, however, is the natural progress of knowledge, and the only way of attaining it. What is attained in this manner, is certain, pleasing, useful; it cannot fail of making the man who possesses it, happy in himself, useful to the world, and pious to his maker.—But this is not our method of proceeding: we begin at the wrong end; and it is no wonder we turn out such strange inconsistent and useless creatures as we generally are. Our notions of God are not only taken upon trust, but at a time when they must be injurious to us. The use which parents make of God is very little more than they make of a bug-bear to frighten their children; they set him somewhere

where above their heads ; they furnish him with terrors and punishments ; and when their own authority is insufficient, they refer the matter to this monster, and threaten their children with what he is to do to them : if the child is frightened, his character is probably determined for life, to be timid, fearful, and superstitious ; if he is not frightened, and has not better principles given him, he is hardened, profligate, and impious for life. Men however vary almost infinitely in their approaches to these two extremes, according to their several constitutions ; but they all agree in forming to themselves a God which never existed but in their own brains—I take no notice here of the opinions which distinguish sects, because they are opinions which nobody ever believed. The disputes of Athanasius and Arius about the Trinity, were the angry contentions of two bad men about the bishoprick of Alexandria. If the emperor had appropriated the bishoprick, the two pretended saints would not have moved a finger for or against the Trinity. It has
ever

ever been the same with all the established articles of national churches. Take away the profits annexed, and you will immediately see, that very few will say any thing, either for or against them.

If we look carefully into our own minds, we shall find that our private opinions depend very much on our characters, and that every man's god is such a one as himself. To be convinced of this, every man may attend to what passes in his own mind, on the most solemn occasions of devotion. He directs his prayers to a being, and that being generally wears the form of a man : man is the most excellent being we have any certain and precise knowledge of. When therefore we conceive of superior beings, they are only superior orders of men ; angels are men more elegantly formed and more fancifully dressed ; and even God, who is a pure spirit, is conceived of by the mind, under the form of a man. This has been so general, that it has ever been complained of in philosophy as well as in religion ; and to avoid it, some have

pre-

pretended that God was the same with space, without form, immense, and unlimited ; and others maintained he occupied no space, and was a single mathematical point. This is owing to the imperfection of our faculties, or rather our having no faculties equal to this subject : for whenever we endeavour to form a precise idea of God, it is always that of a man. The injury would not be material, if even this man was perfect ; but we make him altogether such a one as ourselves. While we are in our sober senses we find it difficult to conceive of him at all, without giving him this form, we however attribute to him a perfect character ; he is powerful, wise, and good in the highest possible degree : but we are not always thus disposed ; and every man's god becomes imperfect and vicious, in exact proportion as he becomes so himself. Hence the variety of religious doctrines concerning him, and hence the quarrels and bloodshed about them. Men would have been more moderate about their gods, if they had not been creatures of their own forming,

and

and faithful pictures of themselves. It is in vain that reason bows itself in silent adoration ; it is in vain that the holy scriptures declare that none by searching can find out God, and enjoins humility, modesty, and but few words when we come before him—men are under the influence of neither—they are in general fanatics ; they create monsters by their own imaginations, and they are zealous to madness in their devotion to them. It is not possible otherwise to account for the perpetual distractions which have injured and disgraced the christian religion. There is nothing in religion which is not friendly to peace. Knowledge and goodness are the very means of happiness ; and religion has been the curse of kingdoms, neighbourhoods and individuals. This is accounted for, when we suppose that men seldom take it either from reason or scriptures, but from their own imaginations. The best representations that can be made of the works of God ; the most express declarations of scripture that he is good and
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merciful to *all* his creatures, will not signify to a man of a ferocious and cruel disposition ; he views every thing through his own passions ; he turns the universe upside down ; places the devil at the head of it, and deals out thunder, wrath and damnation to all but himself and a few favourites. Observe the man, and I will venture my life, his god is such a one as himself. On the other hand, the humane and good-natured entertains more liberal sentiments ; he wishes all men happy, and his God is therefore benevolent and good ; he finds merciful designs even in evils, and banishes punishment and misery out of the universe. These two characters must be ever at variance ; their views of the works of God, and the service due to him ; their views of christianity and its obligations are totally different, from the difference of their understandings, but principally from the difference of their tempers. The whole system of an ill tempered man is narrow, confined, and cruel ; his God is stern, haughty and severe, because his
mind

mind is not liberal enough to conceive of grandeur arising from goodness ; he makes him act not by general laws, and by various orders of beings who have various powers allotted them for their several parts, but all by himself and by immediate and sudden acts of power.

The man of a more extensive and philosophical mind adores God in the works of his creatures ; keeps him with reverence at a distance from common actions, and mentions his name but seldom and on solemn occasions. Mr. Boyle, who was one of the most pious men that ever did credit to our religion, was an instance of this sort. He was a very considerable philosopher, and had an extensive view of causes and effects. He had therefore the most sublime notion of the deity, and never mentioned his name even in discourse without a sensible pause for recollection and adoration. How different is this from the disgustful familiarity of our ignorant Enthusiasts ! They speak of him and to him, as a common acquaintance. They know no-
thing

thing of the powers which he has allotted to several of his creatures, and of the laws which he has given to his works; they therefore make him act solely from himself and intirely at pleasure. They find no restraints from equity, justice and truth in their own minds, and they make God to be arbitrary, and to do according to his pleasure; because, if they were at the head of the universe they would do so themselves.—We see here the source of the contention on the subject of liberty and necessity, God's decrees and the powers of man. Men judge differently in these things, not meerly according to their knowledge of nature or of the scriptures; but according to the difference of their hearts. A selfish, narrow-minded man, would never leave any thing for another to do, because he would not divide his glory or his happiness: One of a generous and liberal turn diffuses the powers of enjoyment, and is never so happy as when he sees others making themselves so. The opinions of people of such different tempers will be different to the end
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of the world : and there is no method of reconciling them but by improving the one or corrupting the other ; by making the generous selfish, or, if it were possible, making the selfish generous. It is true, that God does every thing ; because all the powers of men and all the properties of nature are given by him. It is true that God does nothing ; because every thing is carried on by beings and laws which he has appointed. This is a fine subject for rogues to set ignorant men by the ears upon. They have accordingly succeeded, and the religious world is divided, when on the shortest explanation, all the honest men in it would be agreed. For if they considered the cultivation of the mind and the improvements of religion, in the same manner they do the cultivation of the earth, they would immediately see the truth. Man prepares the ground, sows the seed, and reaps the harvest ; and yet God does the whole as truly as if he did it by a miracle. It is the same with the mind ; we prepare the mind by a judicious education, we sow the seeds
of

of knowledge and religion and reap the fruits in our present and future happiness; and yet all this is the work of God. Put the case that the earth is not prepared, and the mind is not cultivated, and the consequences will be the same; both will be unfruitful.

But I am going rather out of my way—The several doctrines which men have contended for, such as those of original sin, election, irresistible grace, and the opposite tenets of the Arminians, are not so much the effects of judgment as of temper. Every man takes up those principles which are most agreeable to his character, and not those which he has enquired for with the greatest diligence and calmness.

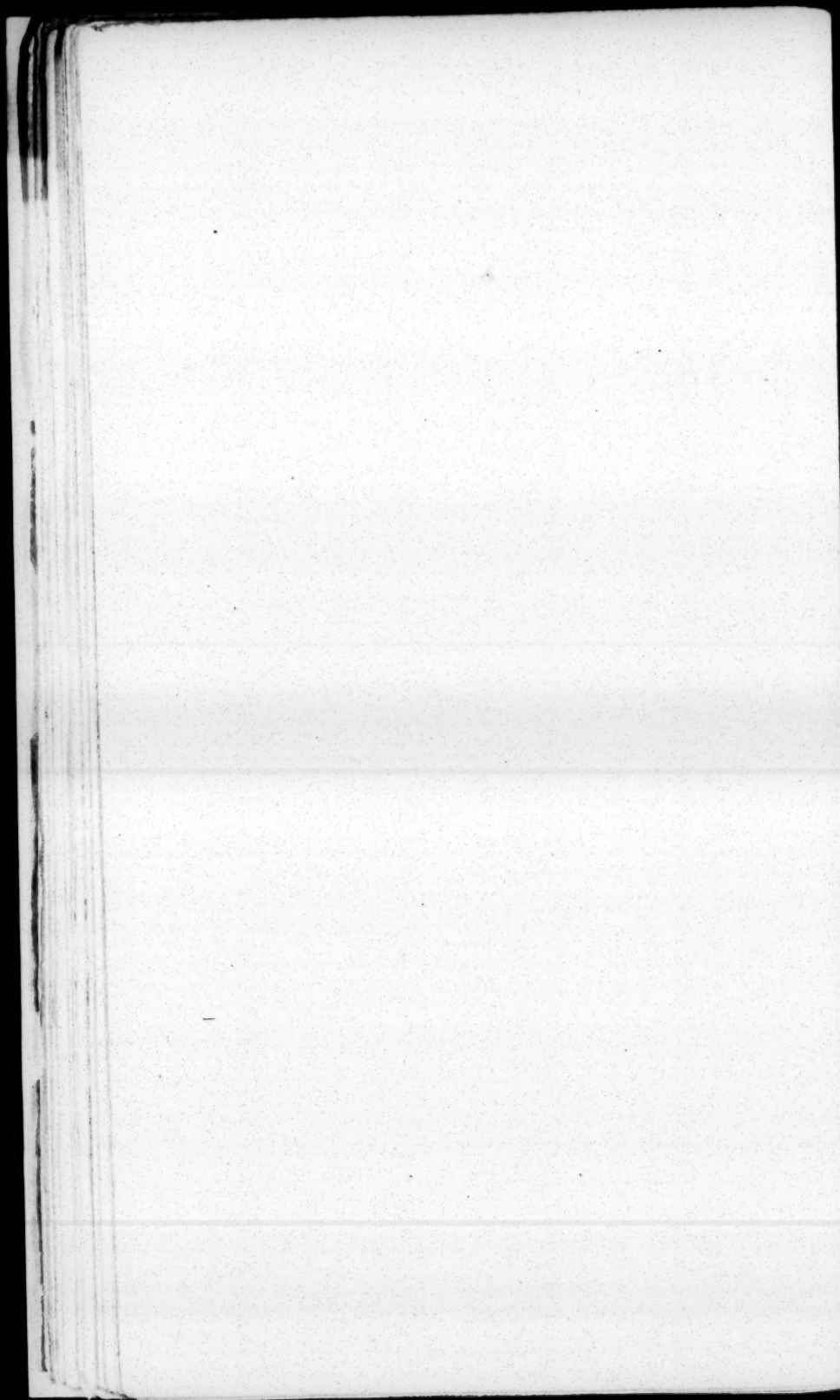
I mention these things not to discourage us in our religious pursuits, but to advise our diligence. Perhaps the only way to improve our religious principles, is to improve our characters. In this sense he that doth the will of God, shall know of the doctrine. Our notions of God will be raised, and our religion will be more excellent, in proportion

tion as our minds are improved, and our hearts are enlarged. This is the only method of coming at religious truth ; for we shall know no more than what we feel.

I wish I could say any thing to induce those who differ from each other, to charity, to good-will ; but every attempt of this kind would be in vain. The man who will say that God has chosen him and a few of his friends for his companions in heaven, and doomed all the rest of the world to the devil, must feel in his own mind no spark of charity, and therefore can never understand what the scriptures enjoin concerning it. I repeat it that we never understand more than what we feel ; and a gloomy, cruel enthusiast reads the divine exhortations of the scriptures to love, with great indifference : but he catches at passages that lead to punishments and gratify his favourite passions with eagerness and readiness. We must leave the world to the government of heaven ; and bear injuries as a part of that lot which God has rendered happy to us on the whole. Our principles are erroneous as our tempers and dispositions
are

are bad. Our success however here and hereafter depends on our sincerity ; and we shall be justified or condemned not by the principles we hold, but our sincerity in the profession of them.

It should teach us humility, when the first principle of our religion is so liable to doubt and debate. How must it sound to a conceited enthusiast, who is bloated with religious pride, that he is ignorant of God. What, when he feels him on every occasion ; can obtain his presence every where, and he knows himself to be one of his favorites ! This is all delusion ! for we see it always prevails most in the most ignorant and the most passionate men. As they grow sober and are improved, this God leaves them ; and is quite gone, when they come to their perfect senses. Let us therefore take every method to render ourselves wiser and better. It is in this manner alone, we can improve in the knowledge of God ; feel the influences of his power and goodness, and be happy according to his appointment.



THE
GENERAL VANITY
OF
HUMAN PURSUITS.



THE
GENERAL VANITY
OF
HUMAN PURSUITS.

SERMON II.

*“ Surely every man walketh in a vain shew ;
“ surely they are disquieted in vain.”*

Pfalm xxxix. ver. 6.

THE state of mankind in this World ;
and the portion of happiness allotted to us,
has ever been the object of disquisition. Phil-
osophers have reasoned on this subject and
divines have declaimed. In general however
they have not brought that satisfaction and
peace to those who have difficulties on it
which have been expected. This has not al-
ways

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ways been owing to the want of abilities, or of the best intentions ; but to having in fact mistaken the object of enquiry. Philosophers have proved without dispute, the existence and providence of God ; and divines have very satisfactorily shewn his justice, goodness and mercy ; and yet men have not felt their burdens alleviated, or their miseries at all decreased. This will be the fate of all enquiries of meer speculation, let their object be ever so sacred, and the arguments in them ever so clear and conclusive. Indeed all philosophical controversy is of no consequence to the people ; and it signifies little to them what we prove concerning even God and his works, if we remove no pain they feel, and leave them as before to the afflictions of the world.—I should think myself happy in any degree of success in a different attempt. It is attended with a difficulty, which is not easily surmounted ; though it be surmountable. Men do not love to have their miseries to answer for. They confess a fault with reluctance ; and they look out of them-

selves

OF HUMAN PURSUITS. 25

selves for the natural and necessary consequences of that fault. They keep the Almighty out of the question while they can think of any other cause of their sorrow ; but they charge it on him rather than on themselves. Hence the various complaints on the hardships of their lot, and the partiality of providence, ridiculous, as they would be impious, if it were not to be supposed that those who utter them are too ignorant of God to be capable of almost any impiety. Hence the various expressions of discontent in those who would avoid impiety. They could have no right to complain, if there was not something wrong. They will tell you, they are not wrong themselves (except in a few immaterial instances). They will not say that providence is wrong, because it sounds like impiety :—but the world is wrong :—providence governs the world :—ay but mankind are wrong :—Here I will agree with them ; only I must bring them in for their share.—Our knowledge of providence is very little ; and general only. When

we

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we descend into particulars, we are involved in confusion from the multitude of objects, and the weakness of our abilities. If we can prove any thing in the way of reasoning, it is the existence of a God. All the other articles of natural divinity follow; that he is wise, powerful and good; and that he must govern the world, just as it ought to be governed. We may reasonably suppose, that under such a government, every rank of beings has allotted to it that portion of happiness which is fit. There is no doubt but this is the case. Every man allows it with regard to the several species around him, and even to his own; and excepts only his own particular case. There is no doubt however, as to every individual, but he is just as happy, and situated in every respect as he ought to be. I would not take upon me to prove this to the satisfaction of every individual. There are many who would think themselves injured, by a particular application to themselves; and there are cases where I would not chuse to make it. Yet as a preacher of truth;

truth ; and indeed as wishing to remove some of the real causes of human misery, I am obliged to declare my firmest persuasion, that there is no providence, or that every man is placed just where he ought to be. If you were to follow me into the world ; to observe my actions ; and to hear my complaints, you might perhaps often find me contradicting myself. You would then only find I was one of your fellow-creatures ; with whom nothing is more common than to think right, and to act wrong.—The whole art of life is to reconcile our actions to our principles. The man who does so, does his duty, and is happy. The man who fails, is unhappy ; and he is unhappy for no other reason. What we suffer on account of others does not fairly come into this question. If it did, it would be sufficient to say, that others can only *add* to our unhappiness. Our happiness on the whole, in every possible case, must be in our own power.

As far as I am a judge myself, from what passes within me, as well as from what I see
in

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in the world, men are generally unhappy from various kinds of mistake and imposture; they walk in a vain shew; and they disquiet themselves in vain.

I have already observed, that on the supposition of a providence; every thing must be ordered with regard to our state here, in the wisest and best manner. It is not to be supposed, that in our concerns, we should always aim to suit the means to the end; and that this should not be the case under the government of God. There is certainly a degree of happiness suited to our rank and faculties as men; which we might attain; and beyond which it is in vain to aim.—One source of unhappiness arises from forming too flattering a prospect of life, and drawing, like an ignorant painter, all our views without briars, rocks and precipices. Our first notions of life, are mostly formed by our imaginations; and in the most warm and excellent minds, those notions are the most extravagant. Every thing is to be the most perfect in its kind. Every situation is to be
the

OF HUMAN PURSUITS. 29

the effect of choice ; every connection to arise from its proper principle. The enthusiasm of love ; the milder warmth of friendship, and the common offices of humanity are all to arise from pure affection, and to have no alloy even from human infirmities. Vices are out of the question ; for as yet the mind has no conception of vice ; and thinks not of providing for an enemy, to whose power it is a total stranger. We need not have recourse to vice to make it unhappy. It will be sufficiently so from its own false conceptions ; and by being disappointed at every step of that perfection, which it had conceived to be attainable.

I might here particularly address myself to the sons and daughters of romance ; a visionary and unfortunate set of beings ; who talk in the strain of angels, and are ever in pursuit of impracticable schemes. I should be far from discouraging warm and generous minds from keeping in view the best ideas of human nature it can possibly obtain. I have therefore ever approved those imaginary histories of
life,

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life, which represent it in the most pleasing light, and with as few faults as is consistent with probability. This excites emulation in the reader, and leaves ever on the mind a desire of improvement; whereas the most natural and most lively descriptions of infirmities and faults are often attended with the worst consequences. If they are not marked by detestation; and if they are rendered diverting by strokes of humour, they are highly pernicious. I think this observation of great importance to the younger part of my hearers, as it relates to the different merits of two authors, whose writings have a greater effect on the principles and manners of our youth than any books whatsoever, perhaps the bible not excepted. All young people read them, and their merit is so great, each in his way, that their faults are not only overlooked, but are allowed to have the worst effects. In my opinion, there is no comparison in the degree of their perniciousness. A young person who adopts his principles, and forms his manners on Sir Charles Grand-

OF HUMAN PURSUITS. 31

Grandison, may have some sentimental extravagancies for the world to cure ; but he who aims to be a Tom Jones or a Joseph Andrews, may be void of romantic notions and unnatural ambition, but will want however essentials in the human character ; and as every man comes far short of the model before him, and is content to be something like that child of nature which he aims to imitate, the mischiefs arising from exhibiting characters which are on the whole pleasing, and whose faults are palliated, is not to be estimated. Some here may possibly think me misemployed on such a subject as that of novels. What ! when they are the reading and employment of your families ! Try to keep them from your houses, and you will see the importance in which they are held. They furnish almost all the first principles of our youth. Our parents are too much employed, either by pleasure or business, to instruct us in any thing, or even to have any conversation with us. Our tutors are too ignorant, or too ill paid, to make principles
and

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and morals any part of our education. They are sufficiently employed in punishing us into the knowledge of languages, which in general we never understand, and which if we did, would not give us one new idea; we are therefore sent to the circulating library, and with a little assistance from the dancing-master, our principles and manners are formed from novels. When this is the case, novels are subjects of animadversions on the most sacred occasions. The general trash which go under that name, I am incapable of animadverting upon, from an un-acquaintance with them: but those who are as classics among them; who have great merit as fine writers; and who have so large a share in forming the manners of our young people, are objects of the most serious attention; and while their merits are allowed, their faults should be guarded against. The two authors who take the lead in this province, have many faults which ought to be carefully pointed out by those who have any concern in education. I should speak in
such

such a case from what I have felt. In reading the works of Richardson, particularly the last and best of them, at the same time that my imagination has been mis-directed and my taste hurt, yet my heart has been softened, and an uniform desire of excellence has been kept up in me. I never put the book from my hand without intending to grow better. In reading the works of Fielding, I have been delighted with the accuracy of his genius, the truth and keeping of his views: but I have been surpris'd into scenes which my heart disapproved. It is nothing to say that they happen naturally. A man may find an excuse for them when he feels some peculiar temptations in his own case. But vices ought never to be exhibited with their excuses, except in a court of justice. Vice is an enemy; and it never was thought policy to represent an enemy as a friend. I speak the more warmly on this subject, because it has been an object of my attention. I have read Mr. Fielding's works often with care, and I declare that I have

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always found they did me more harm than good.

I have here rather digressed from my immediate subject; it was owing, however, to the peculiar circumstance of having our first principles and expectations of life drawn from romances. This, and the natural impetuosity of human imagination, leads to lay down before us all the future scenes of our lives; and death alone is able to convince us that hardly one of them can ever be realized. In every change of situation we find ourselves as in a strange land, and every object about us has little similitude to that we had imagined. We complain—of what? Of a disappointment. Who bid us expect? Our own imaginations.

With so small a degree of fore-knowledge as we have, we should seldom indulge in expectations; and never build castles in the air but for meer amusement. Our business is to establish and improve our own principles, and to prepare ourselves for those variations which we cannot foresee; but which
virtue

virtue will generally turn to advantage. In this way we shall act properly and in character. As visionaries we walk in a vain shew, and we disquiet ourselves in vain.

The first steps we take in life are generally false ones. Several errors in our education warp and debase our minds instead of enlarging and improving them. To say nothing of the numerous methods by which our tempers are injured, and the natural balance of our minds destroyed through the ignorance or mis-management of our parents; the first lines of our moral character are generally not true. To speak without allusion. The genuine principles of truth and goodness are not those on which we are first made to act. We are taught to regard appearance and not reality; and we put on a feigned character, as soon as we are able to bear any character at all. In the general commerce of social life, in friendship, in love, and in the most important of all social connections, we walk in a vain shew; we seldom shew our natural faces,

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and we are often playing a part. This has been charged by the men on the fair sex, and perhaps not without reason. The charge, however, is often an insult, where finesse seems a necessary expedient against the combined attempts of licentiousness and hypocrisy in us. Nothing has been imagined so wantonly depraved and wicked, which men do not commit as an amusement; they suppress the finest feelings of their own hearts; they abuse the fairest and loveliest of God's works in a manner that no punishment under heaven is answerable to. Truth, honor, and every chance of happiness to an amiable fellow-creature through a whole life are all thrown away in a moment and with the utmost unconcern. The life of a modern man of fortune from eighteen to twenty-five—What is it? Would it bear to be related? I could not tell you and you would not hear me if I could. This hopeful creature, however, sometimes settles in life; and he even looks about him for happiness. If I could find

instance where it was obtained by such a wretch, without the bitterest repentance and the amplest amends for injuries, I would renounce my religion as a falsehood, and all notions of God as a dream. This man, however, has had what is called a polite education: has been, as they say, properly introduced into life. He therefore puts in his claim for its happiness: but he walks in a vain shew; and he will disquiet himself in vain. I know no circumstance so reproachful to human nature as the general conduct of parents, with regard to young people at this important time of life. While the mother is perverting the daughter's imagination, and giving a wrong bias to her inclinations, the father exercises the most absurd mixture of authority and indulgence over the son; he restrains him where he has no right to do so, because the law has given him power; and he indulges him where one would expect the devil to cry shame on him; all is well if he does not settle in life beneath his rank, though he

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sinks himself into the greatest villain on the face of the earth. Such parents will complain of disappointment in their children. Would you reap where you have not sowed? Your sole objects were to make them rich, and to fix them in certain situations—you have succeeded. If you took no pains to make them virtuous, you have no right to see them happy. You find your mistake too late; and you disquiet yourselves in vain.

I may be thought to step beyond my limits in animadverting on the conduct of parents: I speak, however, from what I know, and not half what I know. Some little concern in the education of young people, has given me a view of men as humiliating as any I have ever had. Much the greater part with whom I have been connected, have not shewn any intention or concern about moral character, but as a matter of decency and shew; and the requisitions of many of them would be fatal to the virtue of their children. One of the strangest things in these people is, their being
dis-

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disappointed and grieved at their ill-conduct and ruin.

In an age of dissipation and luxury, riches are the general objects of pursuit, and the display of them, the great business of life. In such an age, the words of the text are very applicable to the conduct of men. Parade and ostentation are the end of all our toil and trouble. To make a genteel appearance is the utmost point of ambition, and every consideration is to be sacrificed to it. No affection of the heart is to be indulged, if it be inconsistent with this appearance; and even honesty, honor and religion are daily sacrificed to it. These people frequently have their reward; they are happy in appearance; and God knows it is only in appearance. There are but few passions so destructive of happiness, as that which now prevails, of appearing at all events in genteel life. Almost every man wishes to be considered as richer than he is; and besides the injurious expence which he must often incur to give any ground to such
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an opinion, he is distracted by a divided attention to two characters : that which is agreeable to his real circumstances, and that which is agreeable to those he would appear to be in. At best they are unsuitable. If his industry supplies his affectation, he labors and spends without the usual pleasures attending such employments: but when private dishonesty is the instrument of his extravagance; when all considerations are sacrificed to shew, and he is a villain one day to be a gentleman the other: who would talk of happiness to such a man? He may be dissipated, and what is called a man of pleasure; but his moments of satisfaction and enjoyment must be very few indeed. In the article of property it is to be hoped we have run matters to their utmost length. The fortunes of many families are of too much importance to their happiness to be rendered precarious by any circumstances whatsoever. What must be said of that state of things, when the subsistence of thousands depends on events which no wisdom or power may be able to prevent or

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to provide against. I have no view to any transactions which may now agitate the publick. I would only observe that the general method at present of estimating property is a fallacious one; more than half the wealth of this country is a matter of opinion, and almost every man spends, not according to his fortune, but according to the probable produce of his dexterity and good-luck. I wish to God we may not have numerous occasions to lament that men walk in a vain shew, and that our dependance on their appearance was the most fatal error we could have fallen into.

There has been a time when religion would have furnished the best materials of this discourse, when religion was in the fashion. People then took great pains to put on the appearance of it, and the fashionable affectation was religious hypocrisy. This is not one of our present sins. It may be seen here and there in an odd individual; but it is not one of the signs of the times. It is not yet the fashion to have no religion
at

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at all. When it is, we shall have no man of fashion in any place of worship whatsoever. The present mode is to be very indifferent about the matter; and when we go to church, which should appear to be as by accident, and because some party did not answer, it must be where genteel people go, where one may see one's acquaintance, or at least where one may not be supposed to go from motives of religion. In religion therefore we have nothing to do with the antiquated hypocrisy of being pious and good. But we walk notwithstanding in a vain shew. The candour and liberality of the present times is mostly affectation. Religious candour in persons who have no religion! and liberality in persons who seem to have no principles whatsoever! It is perverting the use of words! It is true, people do not seem attached to any form or sect of religion—Why? Is it because they are become really better than their fathers? What is the consequence of that want of attachment? Look into the manners of the people, and tell me
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any reason which will do them honor. An age of unprincipled indifference is as unfavorable to religion, as that of the worst bigotry. We walk therefore in a vain shew as religionists, and we lose in this quarter many sources of happiness which we find wanting in life.

In moral life we are often involved in difficulties from insincerity and imposition on one another. The general complaisance of a polite age ; and the devotion and friendship with which every man is yours, are the sources of infinite mistakes ; and we complain of infidelity and disappointment where no good was ever intended us. Every man has a moral character to support, either real or imaginary. It is not uncharitable to say that every one is not excellent, every one however would appear to be so. And his pretensions are generally quite opposite to his real character. Selfishness puts on the appearance of generosity ; severity of gentleness, and cruelty is all sentiments and all sensations. Thus many move in the world with the shew of some virtue before them like a talking
ing

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ing horse, and all the duration of your friendship with them is while you are discovering the cheat. This is the reason why we see such numbers of dear, dear friendships instantly contracted; kept up for a few days or a few months with much sentimental ardor; and then broken off. There is a decency in concealing our faults; but there are manifold inconveniences in our appearing to be what we really are not. In this case therefore we walk in a vain shew, and we disquiet ourselves in vain.

The happiness of human life is provided for by a very few and simple principles. True religion, and an unaffected goodness. Those persons who recommend these are however pretty much in the situation of those physicians who have prescribed the few and natural preservatives of health. People need not be told, that temperance is the road to health, or that goodness leads to happiness. There is however nothing more to be said on either subject; and I fear it will be necessary to repeat it to the end of the world.

RELI-

RELIGIOUS PERFECTION.



RELIGIOUS PERFECTION.

S E R M O N I I I.

*“ Mark the perfect man, and behold the up-
right ; for the end of that man is peace.”*

Psalm xxxvii. ver. 37.

TO describe the advantages of virtue, would be to describe every possible happiness of human life. Without its guidance and regulations, the pleasures of sense lose every good effect upon our happiness : the joys of ambition are as the gladness of a madman ; and riches are a burden and a curse to their possessors. When it opens itself into the several branches of piety, benevolence, love
of

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of ones country, friendship, charity, justice, modesty, meekness, temperance ; it diffuses real happiness through every part of human life, and places mankind in very desirable circumstances. But we are now to attend to its influences, at a time when they are all wanted to support with decency the human character: *Mark the perfect, &c.* To go thro' this world, with ease and happiness, appears to be possible, without any considerable degrees of virtue and religion: indeed it only appears so : but even this appearance is generally lost at death ; and in an exact proportion, as a man wants goodness, he wants composure and peace. I would not however, be understood to mean, that we are always to estimate a mans merit from the degrees of his serenity or uneasiness at the very point of death. * In general, his faculties are impaired ; he has lost his power of recollection ; and his religion has no room to exert its influences. In such a case, it would be as absurd to pretend to estimate a man's character ; as it would be to judge a
man's

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man's understanding from what he utters in his slumbers, or in the height of a delirium. Indeed the very act of dying, is generally considered, as depending much less on character, than on the nature of the disorder; the good and bad, at the moment of departure, appearing pretty much the same, in the same cases. The difference lies in their behavior on a death-bed, in possession of their understanding, and thoroughly sensible of the probability of their soon leaving the world. In this case, I believe it never admitted of a dispute, that uprightness alone can administer peace. The numerous classes of the vicious never once put in a pretence. They imagine they have much the better of it in health and life: but sickness and death;—the meer words dart horror through their very hearts; and by only pronouncing them, you may often perceive that you make a wicked man anticipate his misery.

To describe the situation of the vicious, under the pains of a fatal disorder, without one agreeable recollection to support him, and

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every attempt to find one, bringing home such as must continually make him more miserable; assisted by those about him, from a half-stifled humanity, and cursed out of the world, by many an unhappy sufferer for his vices; not daring to think of the deity; and having no prospect beyond the grave, but that of immediate and unutterable wretchedness.—To give you any idea of the various miseries, in this situation of the abandoned sensualist, the hard-hearted miser, the wily hypocrite; the impious, the dishonest, the glutton, the drunkard; would require, at least, to have seen such characters in that situation; which I never have seen, and I hope in God never shall see. Those few persons I have seen, who have thought themselves rather vicious than virtuous, or have been in doubt about their characters, have been so very unhappy, that I can easily judge, that the condition of the perfectly wicked must be the most horrible and wretched that human nature can be reduced to. The wicked therefore, having no pretensions, and indeed making no pretensions to serenity and happiness at the end of life: let us pass on to others

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others who do; and yet are not those designed by the words of the text.

We will begin with the meer philosopher, as, I believe he bids the fairest, of all who are not religious and virtuous, to save appearances to the very last. We will suppose he treads in the common steps of his predecessors. He begins with removing childish prepossessions; and having soon acquired the habit of removing, he perseveres till he has cleared his mind of every thing good, bad and indifferent, which he finds deposited there, by the care of others. In furnishing it a second time; the rule is to avoid every thing common sense has suggested to common people, and to form to himself a set of original principles. He soon, however, finds himself at a stand; and is obliged to have recourse to the refinements of some of his brethren, whose principles he adopts with the same credulity and with as little exercise of thought as he did those of his nurse and his tutor.

When he has thus done with his head, he goes to work with his heart. He is sorry to

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have any thing in common with a foolish world ; and attempts to divest himself of all its prepossessions about proper and improper, good and bad, virtue and vice : but he'll find his heart unmanageable. He may pervert one or more of its principles : but he cannot destroy what he calls prepossessions about good and evil, because they arise from feelings which he cannot divest himself of ; and if he does not give them play, as God and nature directs him to do, they will always make him miserable. He thus spends his life, at war with himself ; and often at war with all the world. He is generally hated for his conceit and affectation of singularity : he is dreaded by the good-natured and timid for his continual attempts to be witty upon them ; and loved by none, but the very few who are thoroughly acquainted with what is good in his character, or receive any considerable benefits from him.

When such a man finds himself near the end of life, he becomes sensible, at least, that he has spent his time in vain. His perverse philosophy

sophy can be of no service to him : he is going to lose it ; and upon his scheme, he will soon sink into eternal insensibility and oblivion. If he has the good luck to keep off the general notion of a Deity, and the expectation of a future state ; he goes off at best, with inexpressible grief at the loss of every thing he held dear in the world ; pitied for his vanity by the moderate and wise, unbeloved by a neighbourhood, he had always affected to despise, and cursed by the superstitious and enthusiastical as the enemy of God and religion. Whatever steadiness and self possession may appear in such a man's behavior, he leaves the world under disadvantages which, one would think, every man would desire to avoid, as unfavorable to his peace.

Let us now consider another kind of character ; quite opposite indeed to that we have just been upon ; but equally confident in its pretensions to distinction and happiness : I mean the meer religionist ; the religious as distinguished from the good man. This distinction,

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stinction, I am sorry to say it, is so far from being uncommon among the professors of Christianity, that I need not fear I shall surprize any one of my hearers by introducing a character he has never known. Let us suppose a man then, to have been very punctual, in the observance of every religious duty, as distinguished from moral duty. Let us suppose, that, from a regard to what he believes to be the will of God, from a hope of future happiness, and a fear of future misery; he has regularly attended the public services of some denomination of the christian church; and performed every outward act of religion which he finds enjoined in his bible, or customary among his religious acquaintance. Let us suppose, what we know is not impossible, that he does all these things, without any view to render his heart better, or his behavior more agreeable: that with every outward mark of what is often called religion, he is far from delicate in matters of justice and truth, and in his dealings with the world, he scruples not, when he thinks
himself

himself safe, to deviate often from the rules of both : that professing a religion, which may be justly called the law of love, he is selfish, ill-natured, bigotted, uncharitable : that with a prayer to the Deity on his lips, he is inwardly cherishing thoughts of revenge, schemes of oppression and cruelty : and with all the precepts and rules of christianity perpetually set before him, and apparently assented to by him, he never thinks of a calm and rational piety, and the numerous branches of moral goodness, are *good works*, which a man may do or not do, as suits his convenience. In the name of common sense, what can this man be religious for ? Ask him the question. Ask him, why he takes so much trouble, in performing every duty of an outward religion ? Take care he does not fly at you. “ What am I religious for ! ” he’ll say with infinite surprise. Thou impious, prophane wretch : are not the duties I perform the means of grace ; and am I not in the way to heaven ? ” He considers religious services, as so many things prescribed by the

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Deity to be exactly performed, not to make him a more moral and better man ; no ; they have no end so low and mean ; they are to be performed ; because God has said they are to be performed ; and the joys of heaven are to be the reward of the meer performance.

Let such a man be brought in view of his dissolution. What has he to support him ? He thinks a great deal. He does not however, have recourse to the heart, where the only real principles of support can lie. He sends for the minister, who being very conversant in the outward duties of religion must be likely to understand their value ; at least, he will assist him to die, as he has lived, in the use of the means of grace ; perhaps to destroy recollection in the bustle of unmeaning and unseasonable performances ; to throw the veil of infinite mercy, and infinite satisfaction over a heart, which it is not in the power of Omnipotence to put in possession of heaven ; because Omnipotence cannot do iniquity and reward vice ; to keep up an unnatural and
ferocious

ferocious confidence ; to fix his eyes on future joys for which he has no capacity, and to make him go out of the world, with expectations raised as high as possible, only to be immediately and miserably disappointed. Such a man in the happiest delusion you can think of, cannot be said to enjoy any thing like serenity and happiness. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright : for the end of that man is peace.*

The perfect and upright man designed by these words, is quite *opposite* to every vicious character you can imagine : he is *different* from the meer philosopher, because he is religious ; and what the one would trample upon as visionary, trifling, and contemptible ; the other, looks upon and practices, as real, important, and honourable. He is different from the meer religionist, because he is moral. He adores almighty God ; not merely because he is enjoined to adore him ; not induced only by the example of his neighbours ; by the hope of being rewarded for his pains, or the fear of being punished for his neglect ;
but

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but because, from seriously contemplating his works, considering himself as the creature of his wisdom and power, and every moment sustained and blessed by his goodness, his heart is naturally led to entertain the warmest sentiments towards him, of love, gratitude, and resignation. He embraces the religion of Christ, and performs all the duties it has enjoined as the means of grace; not as a school boy does his task, with a view to please his master, and to obtain any reward, or avoid any punishment he may have set before him. He considers happiness here and hereafter as arising immediately from the heart, and not possible to be attained by the undeserving. Every thing in religion therefore he does with a view to improve some good disposition in his mind, and to lay a good foundation for the time to come. The effects of such a man's religious diligence must reach every part of his behaviour; and instead of being perversely considered as atoning for private moralities, is used to prevent them. In proportion, therefore, as
his

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his piety is genuine, rational and warm, his resignation to the will of God in every thing allotted him, good or evil, is serene and perfect. In proportion as his regard to Jesus Christ is sincere and honest, that benevolence and charity, which shone in his character and is the glory of his religion, will be cherished in his own heart. It will be impossible he should injure his fellow-creatures in person, property or reputation, as his mind is the seat of justice, honour, and good-nature. He cannot be an undutiful subject, as he warmly loves his country. He cannot be uncharitable and bigotted in religion, because malice and ill-will can have no admittance into his heart. He must be a tender and faithful friend; he cannot but be a good husband, a good father, a dutiful child, and obliging brother, a good master, an honest and faithful servant. In every possible situation and circumstance as his heart is virtuous and good, you will always find him behave well.

Let

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Let us suppose such a man drawing near the end of life ; in that state of solemn recollection, which with every good mind in proper circumstances will always precede so important an event. He finds his business in this world just at an end, that he is on the point of being summoned to leave it, by that infinitely wise and benevolent Being who ordered him at first into existence, and in whose hands it has been always his happiness to find himself ; he cannot murmur ; he must cheerfully acquiesce to his sovereign will in all things.

We will suppose, that in the course of an uniformly virtuous life, he had every success and all that kind of happiness which could be naturally expected from his character. That he can now reflect on an easy fortune, acquired or preserved in a manner consistent with the strictest rules of integrity and honor ; that all the branches of his family are so many displays of his most amiable virtues ; improved or formed out of the dearest parts of his own soul ; that his friends, his neighbors,

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bors, his country, have all shared his sincerest esteem, benevolence, and good offices : that his religion was that of genuine christianity, uncorrupted by any system of faith, and untainted by the least degree of bigotry or party-zeal. In short, that every virtue within his reach has been cherished in his heart with the utmost diligence and care. How is it possible that such a man can be unhappy ? Is there any bodily pain that can render him so ? No, not in nature. His body indeed may be tortured, and the influences of his understanding and goodness may be suspended ; but I will venture to repeat, that no bodily pain in all nature can render a rational and virtuous mind really miserable. The meer act of dying, therefore, supposing it to be great bodily pain, though we have reason to think it very often is not, has nothing in it that can make it very dreadful to the upright man.

But can we say, It is not dreadful to him to leave his friends ? Is it possible for an amiable and good man to bear the sight of
every

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every object of its affection in the deepest distress, and not be unhappy. Can he see a friend, much dearer than a brother, whom he has chosen out of all the world, and united to himself by the purest and strongest love; who has repaid all his rougher and more manly services, by the most affecting tenderness and the minutest attention to his happiness; can he see such a friend overwhelmed with grief, every sigh the voice of anguish, every look and every action indicating the deepest woe; yet solicitous to render him every little service, and with her own heart almost broken, omitting nothing in her power that can soothe his pain; is it possible that the human mind can at all see so much excellence in so much misery, and retain any capacity of enjoyment and peace. It would be rather too much to bear even in idea only, if we imagined the melancholy scene heightened by the introduction of truly dutiful and affectionate children, all thoroughly sensible of their parent's goodness and care in forming their minds and directing their pursuits of hap-

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happinefs; all feeling that they are parts of their father and mother; nourished at their expence, minds of their minds, and virtues of their virtues; dreading to have one of their kind supports taken away; or wishing to have their happinefs continued in making all the returns they can for almost a whole life of attention and service to themselves. We should think it impossible for a man to possess himself in such a situation, or to enjoy any thing like serenity and happinefs. And yet we find it possible. We must have known many a worthy family in the deepest distress, so that even its whole neighborhood was infected by its grief, and yet the dying man perfectly serene and very happy. Is it that the virtuous affections are exhausted by exercise? Is it that friendship loses itself in its duties? Is it that domestic love and all its happy cares are themselves no more, when their ends are answered? Forbid it, gracious heaven! Forbid it, O thou source of all happinefs; and let it be religion. Let me be supported at that awful time by
the

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the hope of existing as I am, of carrying my heart, with all its affections, into another world. Let me be happy again in every object of my love; let me claim again my alliance with those who have been in any measure formed out of my own mind; let me be united to every part of myself; and live forever, if it be thy will, not another and different being from what I am at present, but improved in every virtue and in all knowledge, with every affection in perpetual exercise, and only every source of my present happiness perfectly clear and free.

We have now considered the upright man under the most favorable circumstances, and cannot hesitate in pronouncing him happy. It is no more than justice to the subject, to consider him under those which are deemed the most unfavourable. It is often the lot of human characters, which, on the whole, may be called virtuous and excellent, to go through the world, without enjoying almost any of the outward advantages of virtue. This is frequently owing to something unfortunate
about

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about them, which disguises their real character; or, I believe, it is more generally true, that they set out with very little real goodness, and become excellent from the very circumstances which are complained of in their cases. However that be: it is a fact, that many persons of genuine uprightness struggle through life, amidst the disadvantages of ill-health, the hardships of poverty, and the unhappiness of unfortunate connections. I shall not now insist upon the general happiness of the good man's life in these circumstances; and only just say, that I am sure he must be happier than any wicked man, in any circumstances we can imagine. We will now attend him, if you please, *through the valley of the shadow of death*; we will suppose him destitute of every provision for his sustenance and support; without a child to direct his tottering steps, or any acquaintance and friend which he can be sure will hold out a helping hand: yet *the end of this man is peace.*

Pure and genuine goodness seems to have almost every thing in its power. A con-

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sciousness of it, is immediate and inexpressible happiness. To reflect upon it, is to enjoy it over again; and you may place the disposition to it, under the conduct of a lively fancy; and while you are thought to be oppressed by pain, worn out with ill-health, and stupified by misfortune, be only sunk into a benevolent reverie, be roving in the immense region of possibility, gratifying in idea every affection of a good heart, painting out the sweetest scenes formed by your own virtue, and anticipating that time when old things shall be done away, every clog taken off, and the spirit free as its desires, be eternally employed in the best and happiest duties.

Besides, virtue is the immediate care of heaven. Nature, the spirit of God, speaks to every human heart in its favor, and charges it be never left unprotected and unsupported. Accordingly we find mankind always flying to its assistance, providing for it those things it may want; and always stung with the deepest shame if they are
thought

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thought to have deserted it, or even if, by some extraordinary misfortune, it has suffered unobserved, and gone off unrelieved.

How is it possible therefore, for the upright man, though poor and unconnected, to be unhappy, when the humane and charitable are holding out their property, and happy in his acceptance. You will not say, he is uneasy at being obliged; it is impossible, when his heart tells him, that they are giving their testimony to his goodness, at the same time they give proof of their own.

Humanity unites the good to him, and makes them enter into all his interests. They, in some measure, make up to him, every thing he wants from common and usual connections. Their attention to him strengthens the testimony of his own heart in favour of his character, and enables him with greater confidence to commit his departing spirit into the hands of his creator; to enjoy in imagination all the rewards promised in the gospel, and to die in a firm and perfect hope of that eternal life *which is the*

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gift of God to every sincere and virtuous christian, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You will very easily imagine, that I have had my thoughts turned on this subject by the death of a poor old man, who had been long a member of this society; and had never, as far as I have heard, done it dishonor, by any thing approaching to immorality and vice. I am not a friend to the unmeaning and contemptible panegyrick of a general funeral sermon. No consideration should prevail on me to say what I did not believe of a vicious, though rich and powerful man. I should be extremely cautious in doing justice to the deserving, if his circumstances were such as to lay me open to suspicion and censure. I am afraid of neither, in only bearing my testimony, in this manner, to the real goodness of a poor man.

From all I have ever heard, he always lived free from reproach, though he lived at a time when a false religion was sometimes a malicious gossip, and sometimes an infernal fury and it was almost impossible for innocence

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to escape. I have known him myself only in a few of the last years of his life. Almost worn out with age; having had some misfortunes; and in circumstances of absolute poverty: and yet, though he was a character that had something about it, that often drew my eye, I never observed any thing in him, like whine, cant, murmur, or discontent. When he was shut up after an illness which he had every reason to think, and which he was even told would be fatal to him, though not in some time: in almost immediate want of necessaries, and with a very slight and uncertain prospect from the assistance of his family, he was yet composed and chearful. The humanity and charity of his friends, which to the honor of many of them, I must say, was considerable, and of the best kind, always brought him manifold happiness. He knew it relieved the anxiety of those who had the care of him; he was happy to find himself attended to by the worthy and good; beneficence, seemed to excite some kindred virtues in his own breast; and his gratitude

70 RELIGIOUS PERFECTION.

was sure to reward its messenger. His religion, had very little in it of a formal and mechanical kind ; and was chiefly seated in his honest heart. His resignation to the will of heaven was supported by the best principles ; and his preparation for death, was not an idle bustle about those means of grace, which are calculated only for health and life, and are out of season in illness and death ; but a calm recollection of himself ; a firm belief in the goodness of God ; and a genuine faith in the truth and excellence of that religion, which hath the words of eternal life.

“ Go, worthy old creature, and occupy a
“ situation in another world, suited to thy
“ merit ; where every excellent principle
“ may display itself with freedom, and where
“ there can be no distinction but what arises
“ from goodness. We are following thee,
“ with sure though unequal steps ; we hope,
“ in due time, to be welcomed by thee with
“ a friendly pleasure, on the peaceful shores
“ of an eternal paradise. We shall even
“ deem

RELIGIOUS PERFECTION. 71

“ deem it an honor to be acknowledged by
“ thee, as having contributed to make thee
“ go on thy way in peace, to improve thy
“ dispositions to goodness, to support thy
“ religious principles, and to make thee ex-
“ cellent as thou art.

N. B. This sermon was first preached at the funeral of a poor but worthy old man. It was preached a second time with the following conclusion. The audience in general adjudged the preacher to be a philosopher and an infidel.

My design is to point out to you, the best preparation for a peaceful and happy death. It is important because the goodness of your hearts and the virtue of your whole lives are insisted upon. Expedients may be valued in cases of urgency and desperation ; but in true religion, nothing but goodness will bring a man peace in the end. I may be thought perhaps not to have done justice to the subject of religion, as I have not held

72 RELIGIOUS PERFECTION.

before you the advantages it might derive from the views of heaven and the hopes of immortality. Besides that I love to keep subjects as little blended and as distinct as possible, I think that even the advantages of religion may be sometimes unnecessarily and ostentatiously displayed. I would wish to caution you against any misconstruction of my meaning. I have proceeded on the general principle which I shall ever adhere to, that happiness can arise only from goodness. The upright man is happy in every part of his life, because he is upright, and in proportion to the degree of his virtue. As the best of us are mixed characters, all our joys are mingled with sorrows; and the evening of our lives is always clouded, sometimes tempestuous and horrible. Perfection and innocence are not perhaps to be found in any created minds; they certainly are not to be found among us; and we never pretend to them but in hypocrisy, and never seem to expect them in others: but when we
are

RELIGIOUS PERFECTION. 73

are actuated by uncharitableness and malignity. Sincerity is the perfection of human nature. 'An honest man's the noblest work of God.' We may injure our innocence; we may become obnoxious to the laws of our country, and, as the thief in the gospel, forfeit our lives for some particular instances of misconduct; and yet be objects of divine mercy for the general goodness and integrity of our hearts. This is the pearl of great price which will ever distinguish the man of merit from the villain. We are virtuous, holy, and we are excellent, while we are sincere, though our conduct be far from harmless. When we have lost this sincerity, and this uprightness, we are hopeless—we may save appearances with the world; we may escape the justice of laws, and by hypocrisy we may become eminent saints; but we are rotten within; and nothing less than a miracle can save us. The same qualities which make us happy in ourselves, will make us pleasing to our friends, useful

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ful to the world, an honour to our religion ; will afford us the best support at the end of life, and be our best preparation for that world, where nothing that defileth can enter ; and where from that God who searcheth the heart, every man shall receive according as he hath done.

C H A R I T Y

T O T H E

P O O R.

O n C H R I S T M A S D A Y.



C H A R I T Y.

T O T H E

P O O R.

S E R M O N IV.

*“ When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call
“ not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither
“ thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours ; lest
“ they also bid thee again, and a recompense be
“ made thee : but when thou makest a feast, call
“ the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind ;
“ and thou shalt be blessed ; for they cannot
“ recompense thee ; for thou shalt be recom-
“ pensed at the resurrection of the dead.*

TH E religion of Christ is distinguished by nothing more, than by the benevolence and charity it inculcates on mankind. As
might

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might be expected in a religion so excellent and divine, it has all its precepts founded on natural principles ; and regardless of the various deviations from them in civil institutions, and the manners of communities, directs its general rules to the general feelings of the human heart. Though there appeared in the world such distinctions as those of king and subject, lord and vassal, master and servant, proprietor and slave ; yet it seldom or never takes notice of them : the distinctions themselves were of a civil and political nature ; local, fluctuating and temporary ; and the claims and obligations founded on those distinctions were matter of civil and political regulation. The view which christianity always gives of mankind, is the natural one, a community of brethren, the free and equal subjects of a divine government, the heirs of immortality and the sons of God. On this principle, all its social rules are founded, and without taking this principle along with us, the application of those rules will be either impracticable or useless. Taking the principle with us therefore, we may consider
those

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those particular directions which are given in the text. Our Saviour, at the time of giving them, was at the house of a pharisee, who had probably invited him to a kind of entertainment. As he never missed an opportunity of instructing those about him, we find him here conveying information and improvement in that masterly manner, so peculiar to himself. We have reason to think that he observed in the guests a forwardness to seize the most honorable places, and to give themselves distinction. As nothing can be more improper and ridiculous, on every principle of decency and good manners; so nothing can be more judicious, than his method of correcting it. We may suppose likewise, that the guests were persons of wealth, rank and figure; and that the entertainment itself was rather a matter of form, vanity and custom, than a mean of friendly intercourse, and social happiness. *For he said also to him that bade him, "When thou makest a supper, &c.*

We cannot think it was any part of our Saviour's design to prohibit friendly intercourse,
and

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and that amiable sociability which brings people together, and gives a relish to the common blessings of life, which they would not have in solitude and retirement. Indeed his going to the entertainment at the pharisee's, is a proof that it was not, if we wanted proof of his never attempting violence on the most excellent principles in human nature. We are rather to think, when he came to this entertainment, he found by the guests and the behavior of the pharisee, that it was not designed to answer any friendly or social purpose, but a sacrifice to vanity, interest and custom.

It may be necessary here to observe, that in the earlier ages of the world, when the circulation of money was inconsiderable and the advantages of commerce almost unknown, a man's riches consisted in herds, flocks and fruits of the earth. In those times, almost the only method which a person had of exhibiting his wealth, giving himself distinction and creating dependencies, was that of entertaining at his table those whom he thought likely to serve his purposes,

Almost

CHARITY TO THE POOR. 81

Almost the only method also of shewing his benificence and charity, was by collecting the objects of them, and refreshing them in his own house. The Jews being nearly in the circumstances above mentioned, nothing could be more judicious, and in better season than our Saviour's address to the pharisee. Our circumstances being very different, we are not to adhere to the letter of the address, but to take the spirit of it, and suit it to the state of property and wealth among us. We have advantages over our ancestors, not only as a vast commerce has increased our riches, but from the general circulation of money. This fictitious wealth is so ingeniously invented, and divided into such a number of small parts, as to be much more easily employed in the distributions of beneficence and all the intercourses of life, than the same quantity of real wealth. The man whose property lies only in his cattle, his flocks and the produce of his estate lies under several difficulties in distributing to the poor. His riches will not admit of many divisions,

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sions, without putting him to very great trouble ; he cannot therefore proportion his gifts with any tolerable exactness to the necessities of his acquaintance : he cannot well enter into any schemes of stated and general relief ; and his charity must be rather undistinguishing, uncertain and fluctuating. Besides men of small property, or rather of little wealth, whose superfluities are not considerable, are almost deprived of every opportunity of exercising their beneficence. What they have is not conveyable without trouble ; and not being constant and considerable benefactors, the poor think it not worth while to call on them. On the other hand, the man whose property is represented by money, has none of these inconveniences. It is divided to his hand, into as many parts as his general occasions can want : he can therefore proportion his gifts to the necessities of his acquaintance with tolerable exactness : he can enter into any schemes of stated and general relief ; and his charity may be judicious, certain and uniform. Besides, by
means

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means of money, persons of little wealth, have it in their power to exercise beneficence: money is conveyable with little trouble; and if they are not constant and considerable benefactors, they need not give the poor the trouble of calling on them.

I have thrown out these observations, in order to give our Saviour's advice, a greater latitude, than it could have had in his time, from the state of things and the circumstances of mankind. Charity was then confined among a few, and to be found only with those of considerable property: it is now intirely unconfined and to be expected among all who can spare any thing from their own necessary occasions.

Instead therefore of following our Saviour literally, and saying *When thou makest a dinner, &c.* we must in general say, when thou distributest thy *property* and spendest thy *money* do it not in the service of vanity, fashion, custom and interest: but throw it as much as possible into a channel from which the poor and afflicted may draw relief and happiness.

§4 CHARITY TO THE POOR.

On some particular occasions however, we may adhere nearly to the letter of our Saviours advice. In this season of festivity and joy, it may not be improper to apply it to the general conduct of our carousals and entertainments. Some ages back, when superstition, and intemperance were in more credit than they are in at this time ; hardly any thing could be more ridiculous, than the mixture of gloomy devotion, gluttony, drunkenness and debauchery, which was exhibited at this season. In all the confusion and madness, which such vices must occasion, charity, that divine quality, that best friend of human happiness under heaven, found means to insinuate herself ; and by submitting to the pain of very bad company, saw many of her dictates followed, and some of her purposes generously pursued. Though intemperance generally presided at the feasts, yet partly from real goodness, partly from what may be called the religion of the season, partly from vanity, custom, jollity and a certain disposition of the human mind to diffuse

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ful even its most contemptible enjoyments, hospitality, nearly a kin to charity, had very considerable influence and was always heard in favor of the poor.

From a great number of causes that have an influence on public customs and manners, hospitality is almost out of fashion; superseded, it must be owned by a beneficence of a higher, more regular and more extensive kind. In this season, however, it is not intirely banished; and in all probability it never will.

In almost all ages, and under almost every religion, this time of the year, has been consecrated as an high festival. The shortness of the days rendering the suspension of labor, no considerable loss; and the severity of the weather confining people to their habitation, and rendering social collections and parties, more desirable than in milder seasons. All the treasures laid in, from the various produce of spring, summer and autumn, are now thrown open; and it seems in a great measure the season of rest and social enjoy-

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ment. There cannot possibly be any thing in christianity, that would debar us of real and innocent enjoyment; and if chusing to eat our bread in company rather than alone be a crime, I own, I know not what is not a crime. But it is a crime only with those who are dissocial and morose; and who are on that account, as far from being good christians themselves, as those in the other extreme, who spend their whole time in feasting and dissipation. The character of the good man is without moroseness and without profligacy. He loves his fellow-creatures, and is glad of the opportunity of mingling with them, when it can be done with innocence, decency and advantage; that sustenance, which would merely satisfy an appetite, is festivity in the society of his friends; and to give and receive, were it only a bit of bread, in the way of friendly intercourse, affords him a higher and better pleasure than was ever enjoyed by a selfish glutton in solitude, from the nicest dainties which luxury has invented. Merely giving and receiving

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entertainments, is so far from being criminal, or opposite to the spirit of christianity, that under the regulations of œconomy and temperance, and with the views of promoting friendship, good neighbourhood, and general benevolence, few things in outward manners can be more virtuous, and more conformable to the spirit of christianity : one of the principal ends of which was to introduce peace and good-will among men.

When we are happy ourselves, nothing can be more natural, than to make as many about us so, as we possibly can. Is it in human nature selfishly to engross the blessings of heaven ? However that may be ; it is not possible for a man to be happy, from every imaginable ingredient of social enjoyment, if he sees a fellow creature in want, and withholds that assistance from him which he has in his power to grant. He may be rich, he may be gay, he may be honorable ; but it is not possible he should be happy. We accordingly find the festivity of this season, attended by a species of charity, profuse to

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a degree, that plainly bespeaks the strength of its original principle ; but often loose and undistinguishing, from the interference of other principles, which are no great friends to regularity and good order.

We have already observed, that in early times vanity, pride and policy as well as charity and hospitality were shewn in feasts and entertainments. This was usually the grand season of them, and the greater part of the year's income was now distributed variously, according to the various characters of the distributors. We have observed too, that beneficence is a virtue, much more known at this time, more extensive, uniform and happy in its effects. We have no reason to lament our change of manners, so far as the poor are concerned ; unless it be that our present regulated method of assisting them, tends to destroy that kind of hospitality towards them, which with our good fore-fathers was the virtue and pride of christmas. I do not mean to make any comparison between their kind of charity and ours ; I only mean, that excellent

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lent as ours is, if it intirely excludes them from our company and tables, it will take off from the pleasure they must receive from our bounty : and I believe considerably take off from our pleasure in distributing it. I am sure, sometimes to associate with them, will improve our humanity, and fix it upon the best and most lasting principles.

However, to assist them as we can, is a duty we must not dispense with, if we form any pretensions to the character and advantages of christians. This is all I have a right to insist upon. You are to take those methods of doing it which may best suit your circumstances, and even your fancies. I may perhaps be permitted to suggest, at such a time as this, when the price of all necessities is so high, and the distresses of the poor so considerable, that single and separate endeavors to relieve them, are not likely to have so great effect, as the same endeavors ; united with those of others. It is therefore to be wished that temporary associations were to take place for their relief, and opposed with
generosity

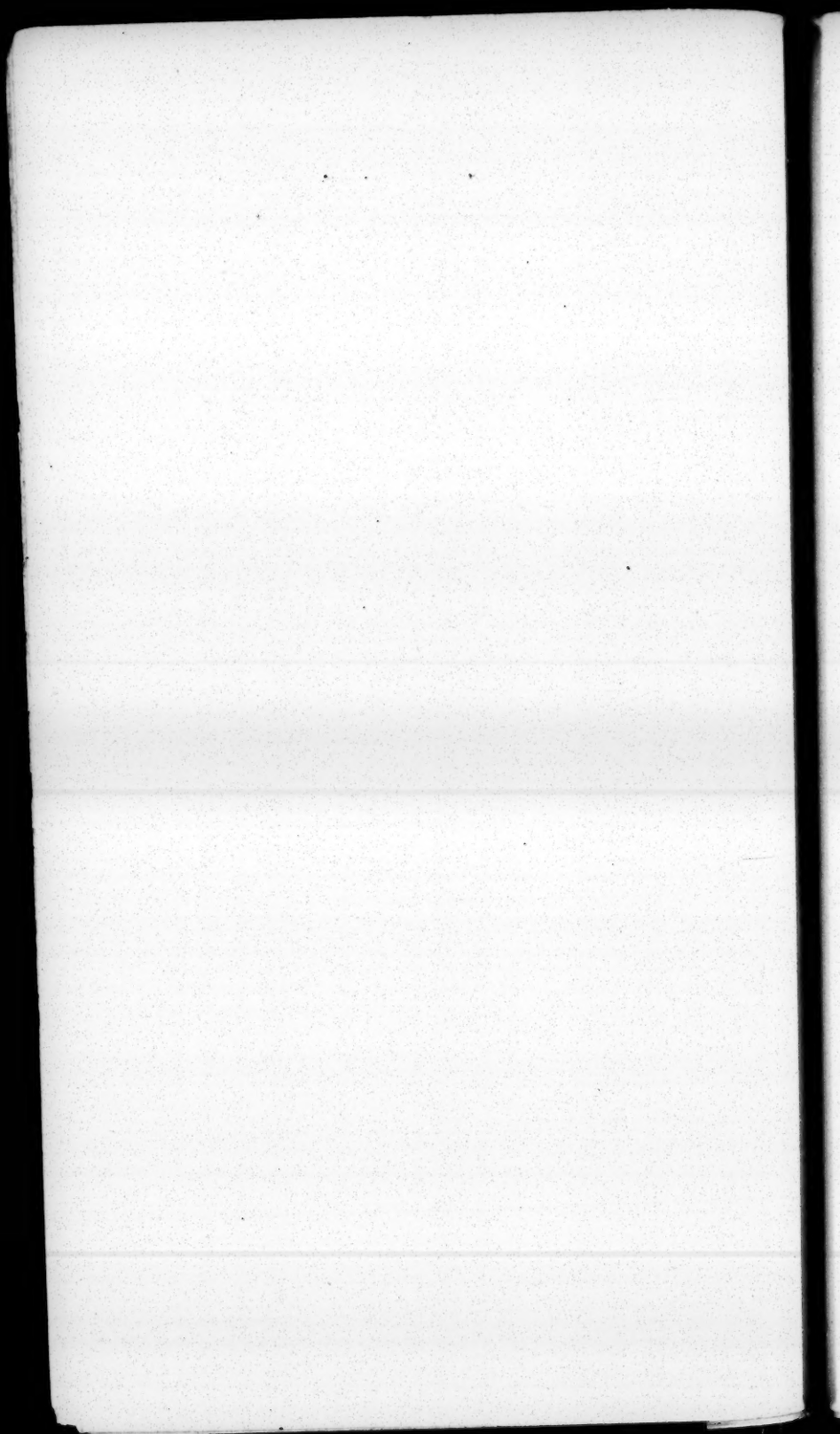
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generosity and spirit to those associations, which most certainly have contributed to bring about those distresses under which they labor.

I presume, I need not offer any excuse for omitting the general subject of this day, and choosing that of beneficence. I thought it best suited to the peculiar circumstance of the present times : and I have not the least doubt, but the most acceptable method of shewing our gratitude to God for sending Christ into the world, is to cultivate the principal virtues of religion, and to do the things he has commanded us. We shall then be his disciples, not in word and profession only, but in deed, in practice ; we shall form in our minds those habits, and fix in them those principles which will make us go in our way through this world, with real joy and happiness : and on the merciful terms of christianity will intitle us to the rewards of an eternal life. Vanity is gratified here only, and by a temporary and low satisfaction. It is the same case with pride, selfishness, voluptuosity

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luxuriousness, avarice and the whole tribe of vices : it is so, particularly with hypocrisy, and all religion that is merely external, pretended and formal ; virtue only, genuine disinterested virtue, hath the promise of this life and that which is to come. It loses nothing, therefore, by any self-denial it may exercise ; indeed it is doubly rewarded by the satisfaction always attending it ; and it will be amply recompenced at the resurrection of the dead.



LOVE OF PLEASURE.

On NEW YEAR'S DAY.



LOVE OF PLEASURE.

S E R M O N V.

II. Timothy iii. ver. 4.

“Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

TH E subject of pleasure, is as important as any one a preacher can enter upon. If we take the word in the most enlarged sense it will admit of, it comprehends all the various objects of human pursuit. It is seldom, however, taken in this sense; the uniform and lasting pleasure, and we call pleasure, that which arises from the entertainment of a fancy, and the gratification of a passion. This kind of
pleasure

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pleasure I propose now to treat of, as it seems to be the kind which the apostle hath in view ; and the love of which he justly considers as blameable, when it prevents or destroys our love of God.

The phrase *love of God* is frequently used in scripture ; it is used, however, generally in a political sense, and made to signify an improvement in the warmth and sublimity of that affection which we call love to one another. This is the case in the psalms, where the Deity is frequently represented, addressed, solicited and expostulated with ; in a word, where he is personified, and has attributed to him most of the principal passions of human nature. This is to be excused only in poetry. The Divine Being is above our comprehension : and we know of him, only that he exists, and that he has several natural and moral attributes and perfections. We deduce the certainty of these perfections from what we see about us, and what we feel in ourselves. With the ideas which arise in this manner, we form the divine character of infinite

finite goodness, wisdom and power ; we attribute this character to a being : this being we adore as our creator and governor ; it is impossible to think of his excellent greatness without reverence, and the most affectionate regard. This regard, as it bears some affinity to the love which we bear our brethren, is called the *love of God* ; and as the love of mankind is the great principle of all social duty ; so that affectionate regard for the goodness of the divine character which is called the love of God, is the great principle of all religious duty, or rather of all duty whatever. This is the reason that in scripture, and in the writings of our early divines the phrase *love of God* has been used as equivalent to the word religion : and a man of whom it might be said he was destitute of the love of God, was considered as destitute of all goodness.

I think the apostle must have understood the words love of God, in this large sense ; and considered lovers of pleasures as repre-

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hensible, when in their pursuits they neglected or transgressed any part of their duty.

Taking the words in this sense, I shall certainly not find it difficult to illustrate the apostle's meaning, and apply it to those cases in which it may be possible for us to do wrong.

It may be proper here to observe, that the entertainment of a fancy, the gratification of a passion, or the love of pleasure is undoubtedly natural and lawful: and those who condemn all passions and all pleasures have more zeal than knowledge; and where they have any influence, must in this instance, do injury rather than service to the interest of religion.

The love of pleasure is innocent, is proper in itself. We are criminal only when we are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

The apostle give this as one of the signs or characters of perilous times. The apostle's view of things was very comprehensive; his epistles were read to large communities, and were the rules of nations. Our business is much more confined; and we have nothing more to do with the times,
than

than to take care that we do not increase any of its public evils, by our domestic or personal vices.

I shall begin, therefore, with animadversions on the conduct of those who have the greatest influence in domestic life, and who, for the most part, regulate the manners of families. It is unnecessary to attempt proving that the happiness of a pure, real conjugal affection, is one of the highest that God has thought fit to assign mankind in this world. Next to virtue, it has the greatest power of heightening our joys and alleviating our sorrows. How often notwithstanding do we see this sacrificed to meer trifles, or to mean and shameful pursuits. This is not only imprudent and foolish ; but also criminal. It is the will of God, that we keep our affections in that order he has given them. The lower ones are to be gratified as well as the higher. But the higher conducing more to our happiness and those about us, are to be cherished with greater care than the lower. When therefore we

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invert this order, in the instance now mentioned, and sacrifice a real and lasting happiness to a low and temporary pleasure, we transgress the will of God, and are greatly wanting to ourselves.

This is the case, when that attention which is due to a family, is made to give way to the love of pleasure.

There is hardly any employment so grateful to a mind not greatly depraved, as what may be properly called the education of ones own children. It requires a constant and unwearied attention; but it ever carries with it its own reward. To mould the sweetest innocence into an active and diligent virtue, to improve the most amiable ignorance and simplicity into comprehension, thought, and knowledge; to observe the effects of these endeavors as they gradually open an infant mind: to see a child grow up by one, copying one's virtues, and assuming a rational and moral character, is worth all the pains and trouble, a man is capable of taking. How is it possible therefore, that this should be neglected

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neglected for the poor contemptible pursuits, which are generally called pleasures ! We see it, however, daily done ; and many of those who are at the heads of families, wasting all their time in amusements and trifles, whilst their children are left to the care of mercenary dependants, and to take up their principles and their manners, wherever they can get them. Is this the conduct of a man ? Is this the conduct of one who pretends to be influenced by a regard to the deity, or the love of God ? It is the conduct of a depraved contemptible being ; who neglects his highest interest, mistakes his real happiness, and is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.

This is very frequently the case in the early periods of life, when all the passions are strong, and the imagination lively and wild. These are considered as the seasons of pleasure ; and it is not every young person who is patient of necessary restraints, and who does not wish himself at liberty to make the utmost of these

seasons. This is a case, attended by greater difficulties than those we have just mentioned. The obligations of religion are acknowledged in the more mature periods of life and in old age ; and we easily apply the restraints of religion to the pleasures of those seasons. The obligations of religion are not generally acknowledged in youth ; they are considered as not belonging to that time of life, but as suited to graver and more melancholy times. I mention this, not as reflecting upon young people, any degree of blame ; but indeed as reflecting a great degree of it, upon those who have the care of their education. Religion ought never to be separated from virtue, from propriety and goodness of behavior ; it appears as evidently in the obedience and duty of a child, as in the devotion and morality of a man ; and the irregularities and vices of a child, are as much offences against religion, against the will of God, as the irregularities and vices of a man. Religion therefore extending its obligations to every part of human life, we may very properly
 apply

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apply them to the earliest parts of it, and consider young people as blameable, when they are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

It is a part of religion, and the will of God, that you should love, honor and obey your parents. This is not recorded in the scriptures meerly; it is written on the living tables of your hearts; and it is the first rule by which a child is estimated to be good for any thing, or good for nothing. Allowing then, the pleasures of youth, to be entirely innocent as they most certainly are, and not only so, but useful and proper to be enjoyed; yet they have their bounds and measures, to be judged of and appointed, by the understanding and will of your parents. If their judgments and appointments should restrain your inclinations, it is your duty chearfully to submit, and to put yourselves entirely under their conduct. If you suffer a disappointment to abate your affection to them, what ungrateful as well as thoughtless wretches must you be! how little impression

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must the tenderest love, and most anxious care, have made upon your hearts ! If you disobey them, and treat their orders with contempt, you are criminal, not only as you make those miserable whom you ought above all things to endeavour to make happy ; but injure yourselves in the worst manner. If you proceed openly, you lay the sure foundation of future profligacy ; if secretly of future hypocrisy. You see therefore, that you not only come under the obligations of religion in your youth, nay even in your childhood ; but you must see also that there is no time of life in which it can be more important that you should observe them : and that if in the pursuits of those pleasures which are allowable to you in youth, you disobey the will of your parents, which is to you the will of God, the great law of your religion and the certain test of your goodness, you are highly criminal, and come directly under the censure of the apostle, as lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Besides the obedience due from young people to the understanding and will of their
parents,

parents, there lies an obligation upon them of accomodating themselves to their circumstances and co-inciding with their views. The pursuit of pleasures, is generally attended with expence of a pecuniary kind, always with the expence of time. There may be therefore many pleasures innocent, agreeable and fit to be enjoyed, which you must not think of enjoying, because they are not suited to your parents circumstances. You must readily acquiesce under those restraints which neither your parents or you can remove. To throw them off, and to pursue your pleasures, while you distress your parents; or what is worse to have recourse to deceit and dishonesty, to undermine their fortune at the same time you undermine your own integrity and your own honor, is to render yourselves very criminal indeed, and the apostle's reproof is too mild a one to be applied to you.

You may be acquainted with your parents views concerning you; you will know, if they do their duty by you, that
you

you are designed to fill up some stations or employments in life usefully and reputably. In order to accomplish such a design, you must be prepared ; and, in an age of considerable improvements, you cannot be prepared for any thing without diligence and industry. As no man, be his fortune what it will, can live either reputably or happily, when pleasures are his business and constant employment ; and no man can make his fortune, or get his livelihood by the pursuit of pleasures ; it must be evident therefore that his pleasures in youth must never interfere with his education ; never interrupt those pursuits which are necessary to fit him for that station which he is to fill up, or that profession or employment by which he is to live.

These are some of the regulations to which young people ought to submit while they enjoy their pleasures. They are, indeed, all comprehended in one rule, submission to their parents ; a duty so natural that it needs no recommendation to any one who is
not

not greatly depraved ; so sacred, that the scriptures speak of him as cursed, who does not observe it ; so important, that it lays the foundation of all goodness, all religion, and all merit. There can be therefore no doubt that to pursue pleasures ever so innocent and proper in themselves, when they interfere with this duty, is to come under the imputation of great wickedness and great folly.

I must not drop this subject without taking notice of some errors from which all parents are not free. Every man must recollect that in his youth he had dispositions to pleasures which he thought very grateful and happy ; but which he has now, in a great measure, if not entirely lost. The man of reflection, good sense, and good nature, makes every allowance he can for those indulgencies which he remembers he wanted himself. Another, perhaps, with less good sense, and less good nature, makes no allowances at all for those indulgencies which he himself wanted. He finds himself as he has grown older, grown also wiser ;
and

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and as he has grown wiser, and imagined himself more importantly employed, the pleasures of youth have appeared to him more and more insignificant and trifling ; he therefore would have them appear in the same light to his children ; not having as yet acquired wisdom enough to see, that his children are not as old as himself. When they come to his age, they will probably think youthful pleasures as trifling as he does ; but while they are young, it is unreasonable to expect them to think and feel otherwise than he felt and thought while he was of their age.

It is also an error of parents, when by an artifice they endeavour to impose on their children ; and when they represent any pleasure of theirs which they chuse they should not pursue, as vicious and improper in itself, when in fact it is innocent and proper. Honesty and veracity are always preferable to dishonesty and falsehood ; they are always prudent, and safe guides. If there are any reasons, either in your own circumstances

or

or those of your child, which make it improper or dangerous he should pursue that pleasure, tell him those reasons : and of all things in the world, avoid the possibility of his discovering that you have imposed upon him or told him a falsehood. If that discovery is made before his understanding is mature and he is confirmed in good principles and habits, you probably ruin your child ; you, at least render all your future advice and opinion suspected and of no authority. Whenever therefore, you would detach him from any particular pleasure, if the pleasure be not criminal in itself, take care not to represent it so ; and whatever be your reasons for desiring to detach him, you ought to mention those reasons, or not to make the attempt.

It may be proper likewise to advise those persons who call themselves religious, not to keep young people at a distance from a society and communion with them, by the severity and gloom of their appearances and behavior. They do an injury to religion by shewing
her

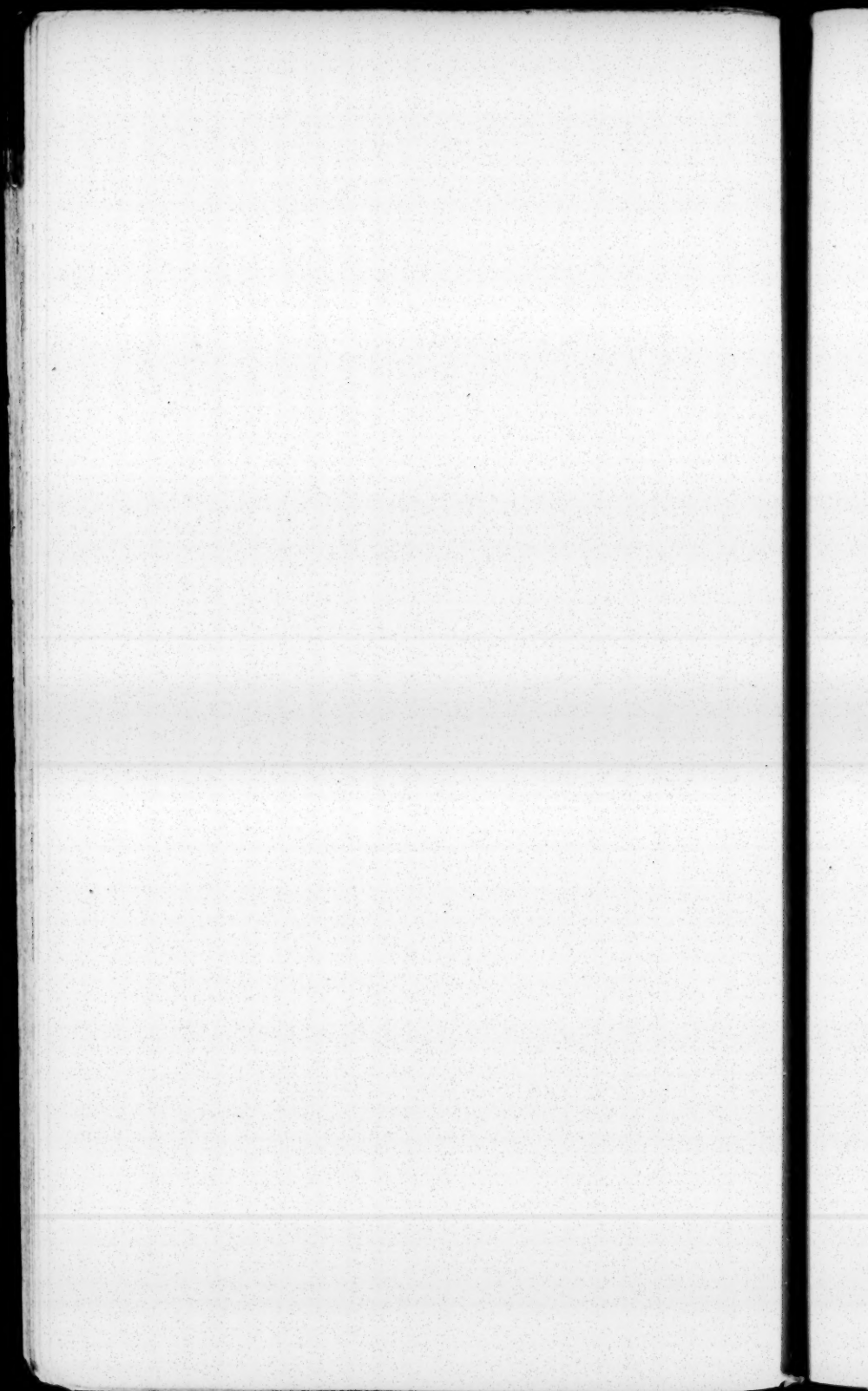
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her in so unamiable a light ; they frighten young people from her obedience ; by representing it as inconsistent with gaiety and mirth and pleasure. This is not only injurious, but it is false. These people are not the more religious, but the less religious for their severity and gloom. They may be more scrupulous and more exact in their outward duties ; but their hearts and tempers are the worse for them. Religion is amiable, chearful, happy, it is indeed reasonable, temperate, regular : it is therefore the only thing wanting in youth to make mankind thoroughly happy. At that season we have all the other materials, and only want religion to order and dispose of them. It is not only consistent with our pleasures, but the best regulator of them. Let us therefore embrace it while we can discharge all its duties, and taste all its pleasures ; and not defer it to those seasons, when we can have little comfort ; when our sensibility is blunted, our affections languid, and our understandings decaying ; and when repentance
for

LOVE OF PLEASURE. III

for past negligence will ballance all our satisfactions.

The design of all I have now said is to secure the influence and credit of religion. I have not meant to insinuate, that we are not to enjoy every thing in the world to which God has given the power of administering to our pleasure, provided we can do it without transgressing some rule of religion: we are criminal, not when we are only lovers of pleasures; but when we are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.



PIETY TO GOD.



PIETY TO GOD.

SERMON VI.

Genesis i. ver. 11. 12.

“ *And God said, let the earth bring forth grass,*
 “ *the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree*
 “ *yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed*
 “ *is in itself upon the earth : and it was*
 “ *so. And the earth brought forth grass,*
 “ *and herb yielding seed after its kind, and*
 “ *the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in*
 “ *itself, after its kind : and God saw that*
 “ *it was good.*

THERE are no subjects more worthy our attention, than the common and general effects of divine goodness. They furnish the best proofs of a providence ; and ought to

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produce

produce in us the firmest and best principles of devotion. Extraordinary events and circumstances, which have the appearance of miracles, and seem to be departures from general laws, never fail to engage our attention. They rouse or frighten us ; and awaken for some time a principle of what is called devotion. We fear the divine power, when we imagine it to be exerted in some violent manner : and we bow before God because we are afraid of him. A little reflection would convince us, that we are devout in the wrong place. If there be any such things as deviations from the order of nature ; if there be irregularities and interruptions in the course of providence, they could not appear to be so much the effects of divine perfection, as the wise œconomy of the world by which our daily wants are supplied. The being who should act only by fits and starts, is inferior in estimation to the being who is uniformly and constantly employed for our benefit. I make these general observations that I may fix your attention on those things

things which I have to offer from the words of the text.

We cannot more properly employ our thoughts than on the works of God. Indeed strictly speaking, we cannot employ them otherwise. But we are generally directed by a simple view of interest; and feel none of those sentiments and affections, which they ought to raise in a reasonable mind. The husbandman surveys his fields with pleasure, when every thing is springing up around him. The gardener visits his plants and trees with increasing delight as they are daily shooting up. But this pleasure is, for the most part mercenary. It is of the same sort, with that of the merchant at a prosperous voyage; merely for the profit it is to bring. The epicure goes a little farther, tastes before-hand the exquisite pleasures of the table; and considers the admirable process of nature, in making grass and fruits to grow, as he does those of a kitchen, all preparations for a feast: the former much inferior to the latter; for nature only fur-

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nishes the rough materials; it is art only that can suit them to the delicate taste of man! These, and almost all the other characters which can be mentioned, have a pleasure at seeing the grass grow for the cattle, and herbs for the service of man. When any thing threatens to interrupt, as we call it, the common course of nature; to keep back, or to destroy the fruits of the earth; we all agree in sentiments of apprehension; and we all look up to some unknown power, sometimes under a confused notion of his displeasure, sometimes with prayers, and entreaties for his assistance. We are apprehensive, that we may be going to suffer; we are afraid of the hand which may give the blow. We find the season does not produce its usual effects;* we are obliged to recollect that we cannot help ourselves, and we turn our thoughts to God. So weak is man! In any condition, uninterrupted prosperity would ruin him; and he is brought to recollection only by menace or misfortune: like the

* This sermon was occasioned by a late backward spring.

school-boy, who is thoughtless and idle the moment he has forgotten his punishment.

If any thing short of a real misfortune could awaken to serious and pious reflections a people debauched and profligate, as, I am sorry to say, we are at present, I think the late appearance of the season would have done it. The extraordinary length of the winter ; the very cold weather we had at the time when things usually had sprung up, gave people reason to think the seeds of them were destroyed ; and that we should have a scarcity of the necessaries of life. People were generally beginning to recollect themselves. They were brought to so much consideration in the mad pursuits of pleasure and of politics, as to see some of the consequences of a general dearth. A regard to figure and character will induce this ; especially when almost every man strains to the utmost to support the character he has assumed. Any increase of expence, may destroy the whole system of their affairs ; and some disgraceful event must be the consequence. They therefore think

think it the duty of their ministers to pray for a better season. For themselves, they have never a moment to spare from their respective engagements; and heaven must be served by their deputies. I use this language, because it is like that which is used by these men themselves. It is all hurry, and all importance with them; one might think, their heads were full of some well concerted schemes, or that the affairs of a kingdom lay in their hands: but their hurry is their greatest wisdom; because it gives you no time to sift into their thoughts, or to laugh at their pursuits. But to return, to the general disposition of the people, while there remained any apprehensions that the season would prove unfavorable. The general exclamation was "It would be a pity on account of the poor!" I have been sometimes moved with indignation, when I have heard this from a man of no humanity, and who seemed only to take the opportunity of rejoicing in his treasures. But it must be confessed that this is generally said from compassion. Amidst the dissoluteness

ness and profligacy of the age, many of the
 softer virtues of humanity seemed to have
 gained strength. Philosophers have observed
 it to be one of the effects of luxury, that it
 improves our tender passions, at least those
 that immediately depend on sympathy. By
 analogy to the effects of indulgence on the
 body ; they have said, the mind is relaxed
 by pleasure ; its sensibility is increased ; and
 all its sympathetic affections are sooner ex-
 cited. This may not be a true account of
 the matter : but the fact can hardly be dis-
 puted, that we have greater instances of
 compassion, when a people ^{are} become high-
 ly corrupted, than when the same people
 were virtuous. *We have this sign of the times*
in a very great degree : and I have no doubt
but real sympathy and a principle of pure
compassion, made men in general very se-
riously apprehensive of the consequences of a
bad season. Yet these are not the sentiments
with which such circumstances ought to be
considered. I mean, they are not the only
sentiments. The variations of the seasons,
 and

and the wonderful provisions of nature, are not to be viewed only as the necessary means of our support. Every brute, unquestionably, views things in the same light. He sees the grass growing for him, with the same sort of pleasure, which many men have in seeing a provision made for their wants. But men ought to enter their fields and their gardens with nobler sentiments, and dispositions that are friendly to virtue. If we suppose a person possessed of understanding, we can hardly see how he should avoid perceiving the effects of intelligence and goodness in every thing that springs up around him. We crowd with an eager curiosity to view some awkward contrivances of human art; and we tread the grass with perfect indifference, and crop a flower as a gaudy trifle not deserving a thought. But did we understand *our pleasure* better, we should estimate things in a very different manner. Did we employ our reason for its own satisfaction, as well as for the gratification of our senses, we should view things about us with
very

very different sentiments; and at the same time, we had a pleasure in the prospect of having our bodily wants supplied, we should establish and improve in our minds the most reasonable and excellent principles of religion. At this season of the year, especially, we cannot look around us, without seeing many objects which we might consider with advantage. Every blade of grass; every flower of the field; the more we consider them, the more we are pleased, with the proofs of skill which they discover. Without entering into the deep researches of the philosopher and naturalist, we all know that the seeds of some plants, and the roots of others, lie, during the winter, in a state which we have no ideas of, but what are merely negative. They must have the principles of life and growth; and yet those principles themselves seem to lie dead. To say they are dead, and brought to life by the sun, is not true; and if it were, would not remove the difficulty in conceiving of their state. However, at an appointed season, these principles,

ciples, whatever they may be, are brought into action ; they send out tubes and vessels of the most perfect and elegant construction ; some are collected in blades, stems, branches, fruits, the others are directed into the earth itself ; and there separate and take in their proper nourishment. The most insignificant weed of a garden is provided for by an apparatus of this kind, so curious, and so perfectly adapted to its purposes, that the best exertions of human art, are clumsy and ill-contrived when compared to it. In proportion to the use and beauty of the plant, the flower, the tree and fruit, so is the disposition and contrivance of its parts. This creates a variety in our entertainments. Their outward ornaments, which are circumstances added to their use, and only to encrease our pleasures, may very agreeably employ our attention. Their disposition, forms and colors, so contrived as never to fail of pleasing our senses and fancies. They, as it were, load the winds with fragrance ; and the very air we breathe, they sweeten and perfume. This

is

is a matter of experience ; and a kind of knowledge, which no man ought to be unacquainted with or inattentive to. One would think it difficult to avoid considering these things as the effects of wisdom. We never abstract a human action from the agent who produces it ; we ascribe the designs of art, to man, the artist : and can we behold the works of God ; can we convert them to our use and pleasure, and yet not think of him, *who giveth us richly all things to enjoy*. In this case, I think my business is more with inattention, than with infidelity. Indeed, there have been men ; and perhaps, there may yet be some who have expressed their belief, that these effects are without an intelligent cause. We hear in common life of what are called lucky accidents ; where a combination of circumstances has been formed unexpectedly, and some very happy events produced, which could not have been looked for. These we call accidents, because we cannot trace out the reasons which formed the combination. We absurdly suppose ;

pose ; or at least, we say, there were no such reasons : in other words, we say, that accidents are effects without causes. In the same manner, some philosophers have treated the works of God. They have called them accidents, or the effects of chance. There is something so absurd in this doctrine, when applied to the subject of this discourse, that contempt for those who hold it, will prevent us from being angry with them. What we call chance is irregular in the effects we attribute to it ; and we never place any dependance upon them. It is otherwise with the chance, which philosophers have adored ; it has all the attributes of wisdom ; it prepares the earth by rain, and frost, and snow ; it brings round the sun exactly at the proper season ; increasing its influence till things are grown to maturity ; withdraws it again by an invariable rule : in short, it regulates matters with so much exactness and propriety, that one might imagine nobody would think it was chance.

The

The laws of nature, and the principles of attraction, have something in them more plausible; but the opinion of their being the original causes of things, differs from that just mentioned only in this. That is pure and simple nonsense; this is one remove from it. To be sure, there are laws of nature; and things are produced according to them; they therefore have their effects: there are also laws of England, and they have their effects: and it is, at least, as absurd to suppose the laws of England to have given existence to themselves, and to have produced their effects, without having been made and executed by man, as to suppose the laws of nature to have produced the world, without supposing them to have been made by God. What they say of one thing attracting another; and the wonderful property of gravitation is very true and wonderful as a fact; but false and ridiculous as the original cause of things. This is a property, differing greatly in different bodies, but differing always with propriety, and in subservience to design;

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design ; if it was more or less than it is evidently adjusted to be, it would be useless. It is therefore itself only an effect ; and is given as a property to matter to answer the purposes of an original cause.

Thus absurd have been all the attempts of human imagination to make a world ; and to produce effects similar to those of nature. We may, therefore, as well adhere to the account of Moses ; and believe *it was God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth ; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after its kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself after its kind ; and God saw it was good.* It is my business to induce you, to blend a principle of piety, with all the other considerations that give you pleasure in a fine and promising season. I do not mean to check the honest views of the farmer, or to blame the pleasure which he must take in the prospect of reaping the fruits of his labor. I only
wish

sh to increase it, by putting him upon
 nsidering those things which in one view
 commodities for his use and his profit,
 in another view very striking proofs of
 e wisdom and goodness of almighty God.
 these things were the effects of chance,
 y would be precarious ; if they could be
 e effects of laws made by no being, and in-
 uted with no design, we should have no
 om for gratitude ; we should have only a
 an selfishness to gratify. But being con-
 ered as the provision of a benevolent father
 the support and happiness of his family,
 are not only sure of our dependance, but
 best affections of our minds are awakened ;
 d we are doubly happy, in what we re-
 ve and in our own gratitude for it. I know
 t how to propose religion to the epicure
 a more advantageous manner than as an
 rovement of his favorite pleasure. To
 exquisite taste, the rules of temperance
 absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of
 the delight it is capable of receiving.
 on this principle self-denial has been re-

commended as preparatory to high enjoyment. However it would certainly heighten whatever pleasure we receive in partaking of the provision made for us, to consider it as given by the hand of a good God. The kindness of such a benefactor would prevent our abuse of it by intemperance, and we should improve our virtue and our pleasure at the same time. It would be in vain to say any thing to those whose delight seems to be in waste and extravagance. Those who give and those who generally attend at entertainments, are strangers to pleasure as they are to true taste. Entertainments are generally interchanged by people who are merely rich and vain. They make a shew; and give an idea of expence. The disposition offends the eye; and to partake of them you must be surfeited or poisoned. Will these people hear any thing of the goodness of God in favorable seasons. They know nothing of what is before them, but that it costs money, and money is the only providence and the only God they know any thing of. I should expect

spect much greater success in addressing the
 humane and charitable, though their virtue
 in some measure owing to their weakness.
 The sufferings of the poor from want, are
 one of the severest reproaches on human na-
 ture. Nothing can excuse a want of charity
 to a fellow creature in distress. He is poor,
 perhaps, through his own folly or that of his
 ancestors : and we are rich, perhaps, through
 our own roguery or that of our ancestors :
 we need not often insist on the difference of
 merit, as the reason for a difference of condi-
 tion. Some of the poor may be idle and ex-
 travagant ; almost all the rich are so, and
 they waste in the sauces and decorations of
 a meal what would serve a poor family for
 many days. How cruel have I thought it !
 when every one in a company had distressed
 himself to partake as much as possible of a re-
 fract ; a poor creature, half-starved has been
 refused a morsel, and driven from the door
 with brutality. The prospect of a plenteous
 season would give hopes in the cause of hu-
 manity, if one could prevail on people to

get while they may, into habits of assisting the distressed. If, afterwards, the seasons should prove less favorable, those habits would induce them to retrench of their superfluities, and they would continue to do good though the means of it might not be so abundant in their hands. Did they consider a plentiful season, as ordered by the goodness of God, they would not only be relieved from a painful compassion; but would feel the pleasures of brotherly love in seeing a prospect that none of their fellow-creatures should suffer through necessity. They would distribute as the stewards of providence; and their beneficence would be exalted and regulated by their piety.

The philosopher, with his terms, nature, laws of nature, and necessity, is engaged in tedious and insipid pursuits, till his heart is warmed by sentiments of piety. The idea of God throws a divine enthusiasm into his mind; he sees intention and goodness in every thing; and he is happy in proportion to his knowledge.

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The mere virtuoso ;—the man who improves his farm to please his eye ; or cultivates his garden for appearance ; such men are like children amusing themselves with playthings ; and may be left out when any serious duty is insisted upon.

We who profess to be religious ; who believe in God as the creator and preserver of all things, we cannot be excused, if we suffer ourselves to become inattentive to the constant proofs we have of God's goodness ; ungrateful for them. We have a more common interest in the cultivation of every principle of piety. For godliness to us, hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. God grant we may in this and every other duty, answer those demands which we know to be made of us.

L O

THE

N A T U R E

OF THE

ORD'S SUPPER.



THE
N A T U R E.
OF THE
L O R D'S S U P P E R.

S E R M O N VII.

Luke xxii. 19. 20.

*“ And he took bread, and gave thanks, and
“ brake it, and gave it unto them, saying, this
“ is my body which is given for you : this do
“ in remembrance of me. Likewise also the
“ cup, after supper, saying, this cup is the
“ new testament in my blood, which is shed
“ for you.*

IN these words we have a plain and simple account of the institution of the Lord's supper ; an account which appears to be as little liable

liable to misrepresentation, and of an institution which appears as reasonable, as can well be imagined. We shall see, however, by and by, that hardly any part of scripture has been forced further from its original meaning; and that hardly any institution founded in reason, and calculated for some of the best purposes, has been rendered more absurd in itself, or more mischievous in its effects.

But let us first of all give a short account of the nature and design of the institution. It is hardly possible to conceive any thing more concise, plain and intelligible than the several accounts of it given by the evangelists. They say, that just before our Savior's sufferings, he rendered his last supper with his beloved disciples one of the most moving scenes that can well be imagined. He had often given them hints by which they might understand that his end would be tragical, and would come upon him early. We have reason to think, however, they did not thoroughly understand him till the very night

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in which he was betrayed. Nothing can be more amiable and more affecting, than his *manner* of taking leave, as it were, of his disciples, and *gently opening* to them a *view* which, he knew, they had not fortitude *at once* to contemplate. The calmness with which he broke the bread, and took the wine, and the *tendernefs* with which he desires *to be remembered* by his disciples, by those emblems of the cruelest effects of inhumanity that ever befel innocence and virtue: the temper with which he speaks of a villain who was before his face, who had agreed to betray him by the vilest dissimulation, and in the meanest manner: and the candor with which he hints to his disciples the weakness they would discover, when they saw him in distress; a weakness which, in similar cases, is seldom pardoned by the sufferer: in short, there appears through the whole a strain of benevolence and generosity as well as wisdom and knowledge of human nature, which beggars all description, and sets our Savior's character and conduct in a light which must engage

gage the esteem and admiration of every virtuous mind.

I may seem to have exceeded my design, and to have been insensibly led beyond my subject, which was only to give a simple idea of the Lord's supper. Indeed that idea is *fully* conveyed by the words *do this in remembrance of me* : but it may appear, in some parts of this discourse, that the general observations made on our Savior's *disposition* and *behavior* on this extraordinary occasion will be useful, in clearing a plain subject of the many absurdities with which it has been obscured.

All that can be truly said of the *institution* of the Lord's supper, is this, that our Savior, at supper with his disciples, the night before he was betrayed, took some bread and brake it, and gave it to his disciples as an *emblem* of his body which was soon to be tortured by his enemies ; that he took the cup in the same manner, and gave them some wine as *emblematical* of his blood, which was soon to be shed in a violent and cruel manner. As
he

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he knew the real characters of his disciples ; that though they were ignorant, simple, and not the bravest in difficulties ; yet that their integrity and goodness was very considerable, and their attachment to him, though formed at first by interested views, was become at last that of the most genuine esteem, gratitude and admiration ; he therefore, with the most amiable condescension, desires that his disciples would recal to mind the melancholy circumstances he was just entering into, by eating bread and drinking wine together in the manner he then directed them. We find by the words of St. Paul, by the history of the apostles, the primitive christians, and of all the ages of the church to this very time, that the injunction was never considered as confined to the age of the apostles, except by a handful of people sprung up lately, and who are called quakers, and that christians have universally looked upon it as a duty, and generally performed it with pleasure. Indeed there appears to be no possibility of avoiding considering it as the duty
of

of every one who professes himself a christian. We must have very extraordinary charity, to suppose a man a real disciple of Christ, at the same time that he neglects a request, a desire of his master, given under circumstances that must sensibly affect his heart, and solely addressed to his humanity and gratitude. Accordingly, we find, that in the first and purest ages of the christian church, it was the custom of all, without excepting even children, to commemorate the death of their redeemer, by what we call the Lord's supper. When christianity received the countenance of the civil power, and its ministers were raised greatly above the people; they availed themselves of their distance, and commenced spiritual jugglers and conjurors. Nothing in christianity could give a fairer opportunity of imposition, or promise greater profit to the impostors, than the general pleasure which the people took in their Lord's supper. The well-grounded veneration of ignorant, though honest and worthy people, is easily worked up into a pernicious enthusiasm,

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fiaſm, by the knowing and diſhoneſt. The prieſts, therefore, found it eaſy to convert the ſimple and ſocial gratitude of theſe ſimple chriſtians into ſomething that would bring emolument to themſelves. They firſt of all turned the method of giving thanks which probably conſiſted but of few words, into a long prayer : in that prayer they inſinuated things preparatory to what was to come ; and advanced gradually in their pretenſions, till, upon the eſtabliſhment of the church of Rome, they openly declared that by a certain magic in their prayers, they could turn the bread and wine in to the real body and blood of Chriſt. The people, ever fond of the marvellous, were not alarmed at the abſurdity, but were delighted with the pious conjuration : they thought it charming to have their God ſo much within reach, and ſoon turned all their attention to him ; to this day he is the principal object of their religion. The ſupreme, almighty God, may be in heaven for ought they know ; their concern is much nearer : and profane heretics may talk
of

of piety to the deity, of goodness and holiness ; but the perfection of all religion is to feel the heart thrill and the head swim at eating and drinking *the real body and blood of their God*. This excluded all but devotees from joining in the communion, unless it were for reasons of policy and convenience.

At the reformation, this *dreadful sacrament* was altered much for the better : and the several denominations of protestants are agreed that their Savior shall be in heaven ; though they would engage his attention principally to *this ordinance* ; and make the partaking of it, in what they call a worthy manner, the very summit of christian perfection. That Jesus who came to reveal the *will of his heavenly father*, relative to the *temper and behavior* of his creatures ; who declared that *to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves*, is the *end* of all the law and the prophets ; who went about himself *doing good*, and has declared he will determine the future condition of his followers by the *acts of mercy, charity and goodness* which they have done

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done, or have omitted to do; whose whole gospel is crouded with the *moral duties* of a good man: that this excellent person is ridiculously made to overturn his own religion: and to make the terms of admission into the kingdom of heaven, not repentance, faith, holiness; but to submit to be catechized by one of his priests; and to commune at the Lord's table.

With some, it has a kind of *charm*; and by partaking of the sacrament at certain seasons they ease their consciences for the time, and go upon a new reckoning with alacrity and chearfulness: the more cowardly and timid catch at these seasons as often as possible; while the negligent and remiss, to spare frequent trouble, and to do things in as summary a manner as they can, defer it to high holidays, and settle their accounts once or twice a year. In the name of common sense! what connection in nature can there be between commemorating with gratitude the death of our redeemer, and blotting out our sins? It is as ridiculous to expect the forgiveness of sins on account

of partaking of the Lord's supper; as it would be to expect the forgiveness of any particular sin, suppose *murder*, on account of obedience to another injunction of our Savior's, suppose *swear not at all*, or any such particular duty.

In our establishment, it has been long used as a public test of conformity or non-conformity; and a qualification for offices of trust and profit in the constitution. With what propriety and effect it is needless to say, as the general sense of the people is seen by the ridicule under which it is fallen.

Among the dissenters, it is the mark of every particular flock; and almost infallibly distinguishes one part of every congregation from the other: as if every one who is allowed the liberty of joining with us in the worship of the supreme being; the *God of Jesus Christ, of all beings, and of all nature*; was not worthy to sit down with us, and commemorate the death of our common redeemer. This is inverting the natural order and importance of things.

We

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We are glad to see people of all sorts and characters at the public worship of the deity, in hopes of their improvement ; and why not at the Lord's table ? Is not that a likely method to make them better ?

We are glad to see young people and even children at the public worship, in hopes that religious impressions will be made early upon them ; that they will be habituated to think of the Deity with reverence and love, and become prepossessed in favor of goodness. And why are they to be excluded the sacrament ? Would there be any harm, if they were early accustomed to think with esteem and gratitude of Jesus Christ ? Or is there any reason in this case, which will not hold in the other ? I confess I know of none. Nay I cannot help thinking, that if there could be supposed a reason for doubting about the admission of a person to the sacrament for his age or character, that reason ought certainly to *exclude him* from the worship of the Deity ; but, as there can be no reason for excluding a person from the worship of the Deity, except he determines to be-

have indecently at it; so I know of no other reason against admitting one to the sacrament.

Another pernicious use of the sacrament, is to make it the instrument of bigotry and uncharitableness. There are many who would not communicate for the world, with any but their own sect; in consequence of indulging such narrowness, they come to look upon all others as beneath them in sanctity, and make the flock of Christ a little one indeed. They must be greatly altered in their tempers, or they will be disappointed to see, at the general judgment, that there are as many heirs of salvation in every denomination upon the face of the earth, as in their elect and choice one.

There are some, whom you may observe, to attend the Lord's supper or not, as they are in humor or out of humor with their fellow-communicants. It is well such dispositions have not much in their power, the whole world would be too little to hold them and their enemies, and they would not communicate of the same air or light with them if they

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they could help it. Are these the *peculiar* disciples of the meek and generous Jesus ; who could even institute this social ordinance with the utmost sweetness of disposition, when there sat near him a wretch, unworthy the name of a man ; and when he knew that wretch meditated his destruction ! If one has cause of uneasiness with another, he should take the first opportunity of communicating with him, as it is one of the likeliest methods in the world, to dispose him to that benevolence, goodness and love, which will induce him to pity the follies and vices of men, and cordially to *forgive* injuries which he deeply suffers from, and cannot forget.

We have thus mentioned some of the most remarkable abuses of, and misrepresentations about the Lord's supper. Indeed they have been so prevalent as to leave but a very small part of the christian world free from their mischievous influence. For while knaves have abused it to the purposes of profit and power ; and the numerous classes of visionaries, fanatics, formalists of all communions and all

churches have mistaken its design : the ordinance itself has been exposed to the neglect and contempt of those, who judge of the several parts of christianity without ever looking into the New Testament. The contempt of the greater part of these is no real disgrace, as there is no *moral* principle which a modern fine gentleman, a modern wit, and some modern philosophers would not treat in the same manner. Such persons are to be left to the civil magistrate ; and their own impertinence and a desire of distinguishing themselves, will always keep him sufficiently vigilant over them. There are others of a listless indolent disposition : but, at the same time, have so much moral merit, and shew such a regard to the good order of the community and the peace and happiness of those about them ; that one would wish to gain them over to any thing of advantage to their own dispositions and characters. How many of this sort, do we see in every congregation ; who neglect the public worship, or attend it
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in a reluctant, careless, indecent manner ; at the same time, that they are far from having any objection to it ; nay really think, when they think at all on this subject, that to those who behave well it may afford a sublime and rational pleasure, and be of great moral use. But they are more remarkable in their neglect of the Lord's supper. In general, a man no sooner finds that the common notions of it are false ; that instead of endeavoring to get better, he intirely gives it up. Perhaps he may hear a minute philosopher make one of his nice distinctions upon this subject, and say that a *positive institution* and a *moral duty* are quite different things, the one obligatory and the other not. It requires no great sagacity to see that this method of distinguishing may destroy every good law in the world, if we could suppose mankind capable of admitting it. A positive law the moment it is enacted by a proper authority, is as binding as a moral law, and a man must have as little social merit as the minute

philosopher himself to maintain the contrary. But it is not *sense* to call the institution of the Lord's supper, a positive law or rule ; it is no law or rule at all : or if it is, it must be a moral one. Jesus never calls himself emperor, king, pope, cardinal, arch-bishop, bishop, and never makes a law. In this case, when he is taking leave of his disciples, he leaves not a command, not a law but a request, a desire, addressed to the most amiable *moral* principles in human nature, *friendship* and *gratitude*. If any one of us who has been useful and respectable among his acquaintance was called upon to leave his native country for a very long time, or for ever ; and should assemble his dearest and best friends ; and after having left them no room to question his eternal regard for them, should fix upon some particular time, or place or circumstance which had been rendered remarkable by the first formation of their friendship, by some generous action where they had been unitedly concerned, or any thing humane, benevolent and noble ;
and

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and desired they would all meet at convenient times and recollect those things, cherish the remembrance of an absent friend, and keep up among themselves their social happiness and love : what should we think of these, if when the friend was gone, they should either neglect his desire from inattention and negligence, or should pretend to have found out that his request was not a *moral duty* and therefore not obligatory upon them.

I need not point out the similarity of this case to that of those who neglect the dying request of our Lord ; there is no difference, but that the ingratitude and baseness of the latter by far the most inexcusable.

Young persons of a gay and volatile disposition neglect this ordinance as they do most things that are conducted in a serious and grave manner. Perhaps this is owing to the gloominess and moroseness of many of those who are most punctual in the observance of it. But, if we observe, the same disposition taints their whole religious conduct, and nothing with them can be *good* without being *dismal*.

dismal. These people are as wide from the genuine spirit of religion, as those of the most contemptible levity. There can be no genuine and lasting joy but in the breasts of the virtuous and religious : and the discharge of every real duty is so far from being calculated to depress and stupify the mind, that it must dispose it to chearfulness and happiness. There is hardly any thing more unfortunate to young people than to be taught that their religious duties are inconsistent with their innocent enjoyments, diversions, and pleasures. They feel themselves irresistibly led to the latter, by principles and passions, which I should be exceeding sorry not to have reason to trust, will ever prove too powerful for all the lectures of superstition, sourness, and ill-nature ; at the same time, they find in themselves a sense of religious duty, which they would be glad to gratify, if they could consistently with their natural enjoyments. But it seems they must not ; they must either leave their pleasures or not pretend to religion. In some cases, the constitution is so

happily

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happily formed that they cannot leave their pleasures ; and they have no way left but to compromise matters with themselves, by resolving to devote their youth to pleasure, and their old age to religion. What have those people to answer for, who thus keep off from religion, those dispositions which would do it the greatest honor, and shade and darken every thing about it to that degree that it must immediately offend every well-formed eye. Religion, virtue, public spirit are the only real sources of *satisfaction*, *social joy*, and *every kind of happiness*. How then can any particular duty be heavy, dissocial, and miserable? Nay must it not be true, that those who are most capable of cheerfulness and happiness are the most capable of religion? Youth then is the only season when the joys of religion are perfectly felt. It may administer support and comfort in old age, but in youth only it gives enjoyment. There is no duty of it but what exercises the sensibility, dilates the heart, improves the understanding ; and by adjusting the passions
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and directing them to their proper objects, religion becomes a friend to the pleasures of sense. To have discharged any religious obligation, is so far from being a reason against entering into social diversions, amusements and pleasures, that it fits one for them, and sets free the heart, which would otherwise have been oppressed by the consciousness of having neglected something of importance.

It is almost ridiculous, after what we have said, to insist upon the sacraments not bringing upon young people any obligation to put on the appearance of old age, and to separate from their acquaintance. Why a young persons having joined an assembly in shewing his gratitude to Jesus Christ, whom he thinks to have done mankind infinite service, should not be a reason for his becoming more chearful and gay, sociable and happy, is very hard to determine to the satisfaction of common sense.

I have thus endeavoured to explain the nature and design of the Lord's supper : not so much for your information, as to put you in
mind

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mind of what some of you seem in great danger of forgetting. If what I have advanced is true, I have a right to expect to see some effects in your behavior. And as a kind of proof that I chuse not to content myself with advancing some good principles and considerations, without attempting to reduce them to practice, I take this opportunity of declaring that from this time forward, I should be glad to have no distinction in this society between the worshippers and communicants; and that I should have great pleasure in administering the sacrament to every individual who attends, whatever his age or character may be, and to see all of you complying with so reasonable a request as to commemorate your Savior and Lord.

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FALSE APPREHENSIONS

ON THE

LORD'S SUPPER

REMOVED.



FALSE APPREHENSIONS, &c.

S E R M O N VIII.

I. Cor. xi. ver. 27. 28. 29.

“ *Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this*
 “ *cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and*
 “ *blood of the Lord. But let a man examine*
 “ *himself, and then let him eat of that bread,*
 “ *and drink of that cup : for he that eateth*
 “ *and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drink-*
 “ *eth damnation to himself, not discerning*
 “ *the Lord's body.*

I Have, very lately, endeavored to explain
 the nature of the Lord's supper, from our Sa-
 vior's own words at its institution ; which

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convey

convey only the single injunction of *commemorating a benefactor*. There seems to be no possibility of mistaking our Lord's meaning; and when we have a law, an injunction, or desire, attended with no obscurity in the words of our legislator, master, and friend; if any subsequent commentator should involve it in some obscurity, there can be no harm done us.

The sacred epistles which have been transmitted to us, are generally written in a style and manner very different from those of the gospels. The evangelists, contemplating the simple and amiable character of Jesus, seem to have imbibed the same simplicity and amiableness, and deliver his precepts, as he delivered them himself. Every maxim of the gospel is concise, and every direction clear; the language every where perspicuous, the eloquence natural and simple: in short, the whole is calculated for what it was designed to be, a rule of faith and manners to all mankind. The apostles, more under the influence of imagination and passion, than
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the great author of our religion, and more confined in their views, have rendered their epistles much less intelligible and useful than his gospel. For some good reasons that we know of, and probably for many others that we know not of, they gave into the ornamented metaphorical language of the east; and variously dressed the naked precepts of their master, according to the various fashions of the countries they had any concerns in. Their epistles by being thus suited to particular people and particular occasions, were perfectly intelligible only to those people, and on those occasions. Whenever therefore any passages in such epistles seem to clash with a principle of the gospel, we may depend upon it, it is owing to the phraseology of a particular country, or to the apostle's alluding to customs and manners which we now know nothing of; and that those passages were of importance only to those to whom that kind of phraseology, and those customs and manners were known.

I thought it necessary to make these general observations on the different characters of the gospels and epistles, and their different importance to us ; because if they are admitted, they will remove every shadow of doubt on the subject of the Lord's supper. Upon these principles, every thing authoritative is to be had only from the gospel : and if there be no difficulty in understanding our Lord himself, it cannot be material, if the same subject be taken up by one or more of his apostles, and by the arts of the politician or the orator, be rendered obscure and unintelligible to us.

How far this is the case with the subject of the Lord's supper, we shall now proceed to enquire. Our Savior, at its institution, gives no room in the world to imagine, that it is any thing more than a social method of keeping up a remembrance of him. Indeed it is difficult to imagine how a disciple of Christ can avoid the observance of it, as it is expressly enjoined by him, when under such circumstances as must give every thing

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he said double weight : but the obligation rests intirely on gratitude, and that duty which christians owe to their Redeemer and Lord. Upon the abuse of the ordinance by the Corinthians, we find the apostle having recourse to the usual address of orators ; and in order to recover the credit of the institution, giving it all the importance he possibly could. It seems, when they met together on these occasions, that they often forgot every end of the institution, and ran into the most shameful excesses of gluttony and drunkenness. Persons in these circumstances were not to be talked to of gratitude, benevolence, and those amiable principles upon which our Savior had rested his injunction ; their fears must be addressed ; and the apostle tells them, whosoever shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord ; shall, as far as in them lies, bring his religion into disrepute, and murder his reputation. But, let a man examine himself, and then let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup ; let every one

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consider what he is about, and not rush into the assembly without any end but that of meer eating and drinking; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (or rather, as the word should have been rendered) condemnation to himself; not discerning the Lord's body. He becomes guilty of a crime disgraceful to christianity, and must stand condemned, whenever he perverts a rational and useful institution to the purposes of a low feast, and a contemptible debauch.

We now see, upon considering the circumstances of the people to whom the apostle addressed himself, that he speaks with his usual propriety, and is far from intending to give us another idea from what Christ himself has given of the Lord's supper. Many of his interpreters, however, have not failed to avail themselves of the ambiguity of some of his phrases, and frightened many a simple christian into such a notion of the sacrament, as the apostle would have as loudly exclaimed against, as he did against the excesses of the Corinthians. The phrases, *guilty of the body*

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and blood of our Lord: let a man examine himself: and eating and drinking damnation to himself; were fine materials to go to work with; and they have been finely handled. The people, in almost all the ages of christianity, and more or less in all its denominations, have been made to consider the due and worthy participation of the Lord's supper, as the very summit of christian perfection, and the careless and unworthy participation of it, as the most damnable of all crimes. Every one must imagine what is really fact, that great pains could never have been taken to mislead the people in this case, to no purpose. If the ministers of the christian religion, after the example of their master and his apostles, would confine themselves within the limits of their real duty; and were only diligent in endeavoring to inform the understandings and improve the manners of their people, they might be, indeed, truly respectable in the estimation of the discerning and judicious; but would have none of that blind veneration and implicit confidence which ignorance and enthu-

fiafm are ever ready to pay to a bold and impudent imposture. The politic ministers knowing this, and considering the rewards of imposture as more easily attained, as well as more desirable to little minds than those of well-doing, almost universally ran into it. A very capital article in their art has been ever since the management of the Lord's supper. When they had brought the people to consider it, as the grand specific for the blotting out of sins, the great restorer of the heavenly disposition, and the never-failing qualification for the kingdom of God ; and to believe that by not partaking of it, or by partaking of it in an improper manner, they were to go to hell for ever ; the ministers then secured the administration of it to themselves ; had the art to get every thing of the kind considered as without virtue that had not passed through their sacred hands ; and in the true spirit of quackery, affected infinite parade and mystery, in an affair which might have been as well executed by any honest man in their assemblies. In order to heighten the solemnity

solemnity and importance of this affair, and by that means their own solemnity and importance, they contrived a curious interpretation of the phrase, *let a man examine himself*: i. e. according to them, *let a man be examined by the minister*; and then, and not till then, let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. That no man, be he minister or no minister, has any business with the state of another's mind, further than to advise and wish him the best dispositions, is indisputable, upon the principles of nature and common sense; but spiritual dominion and tyranny like the civil, is not to be supported but by various encroachments on natural rights. That the Lord's supper is open to all the professors of christianity, every man must see upon reading the words of the institution. There is not the least room to imagine, from any thing our Savior says, that his ministers were to have it in their power to exclude whom they pleased from it. There is not a word said about preparation or any qualification for the people's attendance.

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And though the apostle, upon a shameful abuse of the institution among the Corinthians, advised them to examine themselves, to consider what they were going to do, yet there is not one word about being examined by the minister, and we may look upon that custom, as set up with views which can do no honor to the sacred profession. To say nothing of the probability of getting into family secrets by this method ; to be in possession of the private weaknesses of individuals gives a minister an influence which nothing but the most tender friendship has a right to, and which it is always iniquitous to aim at.

Upon this subject of examination, I hope I shall not be mistaken. At the same time that I assert that there is not a word in the New Testament, that gives the minister a pretence to examine the people before they are admitted to the ordinance, or to prescribe any condition of admission ; that from its very nature, and every circumstance of its institution, it is social, free, open to all who
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chuse to attend it ; yet I should be sorry to be understood, as meaning that it does not signify in this case what a man is, as to his character and principles, and that one man will receive just as much benefit as another. As I have already intimated, that I look upon the elements to be mere bread and wine, and to have no more than their natural virtue ; that all the ministers upon earth cannot possibly endue them with any charm or magic so as to have the least effect upon moral dispositions and religious temper ; of course, I must think that all the good that can be done [by] partaking of them depends on the communicant himself. If he attends as a real disciple of Jesus Christ, and with a sincere design of joining with his fellow-christians in an act of grateful remembrance : some of the best principles in his mind will be exercised and improved at the same time that he gives his testimony to a religion, which he thinks hath the words of eternal life. If he attends without that design ; he is guilty of a shameful and criminal absurdity.

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furdity. For this reason the apostle's advice may be now of use; and every man should be desired to *examine himself*; to see that he has some notion of the end and design of what he is going to do; and then to eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.

I must not here neglect to take notice of an error in this self-examination, into which some very good people have fallen. They found the exhortation, let a man examine himself, attended by the dreadful denunciations, that whosoever eat and drank unworthily, eat and drank damnation to themselves, and were guilty of the body and blood of our Lord. Their ministers, seldom thought it their interest to give them the the real import of these phrases, that one of them was a figurative method of saying that they should hurt the credit of their religion, and that the meaning of the other was given by restoring condemnation, which was the real word in the original, instead of damnation, which is preposterously inserted in the translation. In those circumstances,
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it is natural to imagine, the people would spare no pains in examining themselves, and preparing for an ordinance, upon which they were taught that so much depended. No friend to religion can have any objection to a sincere and proper self-examination. But this, like many other good exercises of the mind, may be directed to wrong ends; and have many bad effects. Who would ever think of preparing himself by a formal examination for doing an act of charity and kindness to any of his fellow creatures; or for performing any real virtue? And why are we to be so prepared for commemorating with gratitude the character of our redeemer? That we should recollect ourselves and consider what we are going to do, when we enter on any part of public religion, is very reasonable, and what we owe to public decency: but to spend several days in preparing for what the human heart is always prepared, is at least throwing away time, which if we knew any thing of the weightier matters of the law, we might employ to a
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much better purpose. There is even reason to fear, that it is not meer loss of time, but that it is attended with pernicious consequences. Those who pass this examination with satisfaction to themselves, are so distinguished in their own opinion, and sometimes in the public estimation, that they become conceited and vain beyond all possibility of cure. Common vanity, as well as all other common vices, is within the reach of a skilful moralist; but spiritual pride, as it is never acknowledged by the patient to be a disorder, and has many of the outward marks of real virtue, has never been thought curable by any tolerable judge of the human heart. Few things contribute more to this bane of almost every religious and social virtue, than the common distinction in religious assemblies between the worshippers and the communicants, occasioned by the farce of a previous preparation. The first consequence on the mind of the communicant, is an opinion that he has gone through what others have not been able to go through, and that

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in consequence he must be better than they are. If he happens to mistake, as is very often the case, he is ruined: for he has a superior character to support without any of the talents necessary to it. He has recourse therefore to the common imposition, and endeavors to persuade mankind that he is very good, because there is no vice or failing among all his acquaintance which does not call forth his bitterest animadversion. By these means he becomes dissocial, uncharitable and gloomy. If any of you will take the trouble to recollect the state of your acquaintance, and should find me in an error, I should be glad to be convinced of it, and be extremely happy in publicly contradicting what I have now said. I must confess I have very little hopes of such conviction, as I have very seldom seen a person upon his becoming a strict communicant, grow more sociable, good-natured, and benevolent. This is not owing to any thing in the institution, which is directly calculated to promote those very virtues which are so remarkably wanting in the generality of

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communicants. It is certainly owing to that conceit and pride which is created by distinction ; and would never take place if the Lord's supper was as open to all as our Savior himself left it. Those who are not of the select number, but herd with the common flock, become negligent of this duty from a ridiculous notion that it requires greater perfection, than they can pretend to : or else they see through the imposture of their sanctified brethren, and look upon the institution itself as a farce.

But the most pernicious of all the consequences of this examination and this distinction are those which it has upon young people. The formality and severity, with which it is conducted will almost always either keep them from the attempt, or make them hypocrites in it ; in the one case they are denied the advantages of an early religion, and in the other are rendered incapable of any real virtue for their whole lives. If we read the words of our Savior we must think, if there be any distinction to be made from ages, it must be
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in favor of young people, that the institution is peculiarly suited to them. The principles of gratitude, social love and genuine benevolence are in youth fond of exercise, unhurt by the disappointments of life, and attended with the most exquisite satisfaction. But they must not avail themselves of these advantages in this case; they must either submit to conditions, which it is impossible for those who are not naturally insensible and stupid to submit to with sincerity; or defer this affair to the decline of life when those principles which give enjoyment to every religious duty are greatly weakened and nearly spent. I do not mean to say, that they should not examine themselves, in the sense of the apostle; that is, consider what they are going to do: but they are not to devote days, or even many hours to an examination of their crimes and to atone for them; for this good reason, that they would have no employment for themselves. They may recollect, that in the great road of life, impelled by the vivacity of their passions, they have

had many a stumble, but that man deserves ill of the friends of virtue, who would tell them they had committed a crime. And the general directions given young people to find out and correct their crimes, serve only as directions how to commit them. You may tell them indeed, that the gratifications of their passions, and their love of life is criminal, and they may tell you, that they think so ; but you may depend upon it there is not a word of truth in what they say ; and the grave and the old may keep their religion to themselves, if they render it inconsistent with what God has made absolutely necessary to the happiness of human life.

It may be thought necessary on this subject, to take notice of those passages where the apostle advises the primitive christians to keep separate and pure : to put away wicked persons from among them ; and even not to eat with them. I do not recollect any of these passages that can well be so far mistaken as to be referred to the Lord's supper ; if there were any such, it would be sufficient

to oppose to them the example of our Savior, who instituted the Lord's supper when Judas Iscariot was present, and partook of it in company with him. These passages are all founded on reasons that can have no influence on us now as societies and congregations. The christians in the days of the apostles were so obnoxious to the rest of the world, or so much neglected that they were under a necessity of forming themselves into separate bodies, to throw all property into a common stock, and to give up almost all those little interests which are so important to private and domestic happiness, in order to secure the general interest of the body. They were also endeavoring to introduce a new religion into the world, and were to recommend it by the purity of their manners, as well as the goodness of their precepts. In such circumstances they had peculiar reasons for examining those who desired to be admitted among them, as they would have been burdened with all those vagrants and idlers we may suppose abounded in those countries

where they settled, as they have always done in all others ; and by treating persons of infamous characters as their fellows and brethren, they would have immediately discredited their religion, and must have intirely ruined any new cause. We see then that there were reasons in their case which we cannot pretend to. We never hear of any distinction among them between professors of the christian religion, and communicants at the Lord's table ; and yet a person was obliged to come up to a certain degree of goodness to be fit for the sacrament. All christians of all ages, and of all degrees of goodness were communicants, without a single exception ; and a man then to pretend to be a christian and not attend the sacrament, would have been thought as absurd a creature, as a man now would be if he pretended to a religious character when his conduct was immoral and profane.

To be sure, it would be very desirable if all our religious assemblies, were made up of such persons as would do honor to our profession

feſſion. But if that be not the caſe ; our buſineſs is not to indulge our ſpleen and ill-nature by a rigid ſeverity, where we have no right to be ſevere ; but to endeavor by an exemplary good-nature, affability, and charity to reclaim the vicious and imprudent. Inſtead of keeping them at a diſtance, let us invite them nearer ; and by our decency and devotion in the diſcharge of every public duty, and by the amiableneſs and goodneſs of our private tempers and manners, let us engage their imitation. In this method we ſhall be ſure to do our duty, whereas in the ways of diſcipline and correction we never know what we are about, and, in my opinion, we are always wrong. I therefore now repeat the declaration I made ſome time ſince, which from its novelty, I have reaſon to think ſurprized ſome people, that I ſhould be glad to ſee no diſtinction kept up in this congregation between the common worſhippers and the members in communion. The better the character of every member, the more credit he gives to the ſociety ; but
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if any one behaves ill, notwithstanding his public profession of attachment to Jesus Christ and his religion, such is the justice of the world, and we may be sure, such is the justice of the Deity, that all infamy and punishment will fall upon himself. Wherefore, *whofoever*, &c.

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